

AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION AND IRISH RURAL
SOCIETY 1880-1914

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To Judy—part of life's sunshine

"... history is more than a record of fact: it is a perpetual battle of the mind"—Hugh Trevor-Roper.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the formation of the Irish co-operative movement in the final decade of the nineteenth century and traces its progress through to the outbreak of the Great War. Co-operative organisation is first viewed as a form of agricultural innovation and its adoption and diffusion patterns explored. The reactions of various social groupings - landlords, clergymen, tenant farmers, nationalist politicians, traders - to the new movement are then discussed in some detail. On the basis of this discussion some tentative generalisations regarding the rural social structure are developed. The economic role of the Roman Catholic clergy, the distribution of political power in rural Ireland, and the emergence of interest group politics are also treated. Other features examined relate to the economic performance of the retailing sector, the apparent multiplicity of traders in the rural economy, and the supply of agricultural credit - all issues that occupied the attention of leading co-operators. There is also a considerable emphasis on the discussion of methodological issues.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter One.</u> An Overview of the Historical Development of Irish Co-operation 1880-1914	5
Horace Plunkett	5
From co-operation to a department of agricul- ture	13
The I.A.O.S.	19
The Creameries	22
Credit societies	28
Agricultural societies	32
Miscellaneous societies	36
The position of the movement in 1914	38
Appendix to chapter one	42
<u>Chapter Two.</u> Adoption of Co-operative Organisation: The Early Years	56
Technical change in agriculture	56
Changing environment	59
Farmers' evaluation of the co-operative idea	64
Later stages of the adoption/rejection process	68
<u>Chapter Three.</u> An Evaluation of the Jones' Model	75
Interdependencies in decision making	75
Socio-political dimensions of innovation	78
The role of time	80
Appendix to chapter three	85

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Chapter Four.</u> The Spread of Co-operative Creameries	89
Supply and demand factors in relation to innovation	90
The uneven spread of creameries	99
<u>Chapter Five.</u> The Early Response of the Irish Catholic Clergy to the Co-operative Movement	109
The institutional church : economic and social ideals	110
Two hypotheses and some evidence	113
Conflict of economic interests	117
Further evidence and attempted synthesis	123
Concluding comments	127
Appendix to chapter five	134
<u>Chapter Six.</u> The Roman Catholic Church and Economic Growth	135
<u>Chapter Seven.</u> Farming Interests, Traders, and Political Power	157
Traders and political power	158
Agricultural politics	160
Debt bondage	170
Some bases for political power	172
Appendix to chapter seven	185
<u>Chapter Eight.</u> Retail Markets in Rural Ireland	187
Profit levels	189
Unethical practices	194
Product suitability and participant rationality	197
Exchange efficiency	201
Appendix to chapter eight	209

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Chapter Nine.</u> Traders in the Irish Rural Economy 1880-1914	213
Trader density and prices	214
Barriers to entry	217
Size of the retailing sector	219
Some general implications	223
Appendix to chapter nine	230
 <u>Chapter Ten.</u> The Irish "Gombeenman"	 235
The "Gombeenman"	235
Credit in a developing economy	241
 <u>Chapter Eleven.</u> The Irish Rural Social Structure: Elements of Stability and Change 1880-1914	 246
Early response to the formation of co-operatives	252
Patterns of social conflict	262
Problems of peasant political action	266
The forces of stabilisation	271
 <u>Sources.</u>	 287

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In the beginning I had some difficulty in settling on a research project that was acceptable to both the University of York and to myself. An original proposal for a study of collectivised agriculture was deflected by Professor Sigsworth - lack of a working knowledge of Russian, Serbo-Croat and other non-Gaelic tongues being regarded as something of a disadvantage. A later proposal for a historical study of Irish co-operation, while not accorded a rapturous welcome, at least appeared to be fairly viable and was accepted. I was then entrusted to the academic care of Edmund Cooney, who on the basis of his ancestry, could be presumed to have some empathy with the inhabitants of the neighbouring island.

This thesis represents the eventual outcome of those early choices and decisions. So, to proceed in chronological fashion, I should first extend my sincere thanks to Professor Sigsworth for despatching me - intellectually speaking - back to my own country. With hindsight I can now see how fundamental and how correct that decision was. The influence of others at the University of York has been more direct. Ron Weir and other members of the Dept. of Economics and Related Studies provided both intellectual stimulation and continuing encouragement. In particular, Ron's course on the economic and social history of the Celtic fringe gave me a belated introduction to the study of Irish history. Alan Warren of the Dept. of History gave considerably more assistance than he probably realises, especially at an early stage of the study. Among economists who helped clarify some of my thinking Arthur Walker and Guiliana Parodi deserve special mention.

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Unfortunately, in one sense, the study was then at an advanced stage so that it has not benefited from their comments nearly so much as it might have done had the material been at an earlier and more malleable stage. Similarly, while I can claim to have inflicted various sections of the thesis on Cormac Ó Gráda, David Dickson, John Whyte, and K.T. Hoppen, their role has necessarily been one of responding within a framework of previously fashioned ideas. I am grateful in that these have suggested useful modifications and have saved me from various errors, but I only wish I could have exploited their creative potential more.

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11 chapters on the broad theme of agricultural co-operation and Irish rural society. Thus, at the level of motivation, I must acknowledge a further debt.

As is apparent from both the text and the bibliography, I have drawn on the work of a diverse group of writers in shaping this study. Their contribution, in the sense that they furnished not only a base for the present study but also provided stimulating hypotheses, should be acknowledged. I am, of course, sometimes critical of aspects of other people's work. This does not mean that I am misanthropic by nature (and even if I am I am not prepared to subscribe publicly to such a negative self-image); rather it should be seen as a form of compliment, albeit a bit double-edged.

My wife insists on being acknowledged. I would, in any case, have felt obliged to perform this conventional task. Her support - to adapt a piece of fringe left terminology - may be described as critical but unconditional. Without her sympathetic understanding there would have been one further addition to the stockpile of unfinished theses.

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"Study problems in preference to periods" - Lord Acton.

INTRODUCTION

This study has a dual focus: (a) the early progress of the co-operative movement is traced (b) co-operative development is used as a medium through which rural society may be viewed and analysed. Perhaps the first point that should be emphasised is that this is not a history of agricultural co-operation in Ireland. A number of such general studies exist already (see bibliography) so there seemed to be no special value in producing further work along those lines. Analytical studies of Irish co-operation are, by contrast, comparatively rare. Much more remains to be done on this front, but it is hoped that the cluster of sub-studies presented here goes some way towards remedying the deficiency.

In its formative period the Irish co-operative movement had a strongly disruptive potential, particularly in rural Ireland. This in itself is unremarkable, what is significant though from the point of view of our second level of analysis is the distinctive character of the alliances and tensions it engendered. By cutting across groups' existing patterns of conflict and solidarity, co-operation is instrumental in revealing some of the underlying structures of rural society. In this perspective, for instance, social relationships enveloping landlords, tenant farmers, traders, and clergy emerge in a quite interesting light.

There is a further sense in which the study of co-operation is especially fruitful. The co-operative pioneers commented on a wide range of themes that relate to rural economy and society. Their ideas, treated as hypotheses, are valuable for historians, economists and sociologists. (The writings of Horace Plunkett in particular deserve a far better fate than that of providing occasional illustra-

tive material for political and social historians.) However, to deal adequately with even the major lines of thought unloosed by these co-operators would require a very considerable research input over a long period of time. Since in the long term even economic historians are dead I have eschewed any idea of a comprehensive treatment of the various issues raised. Such an attempt, within the confines of this thesis, would have necessarily degenerated into superficial comment. I have, therefore, contented myself with selecting, and exploring in some detail, a number of hypotheses that appeared significant not only in the context of co-operative history but also in the context of general historiography or social scientific enquiry. Thus, for example, Horace Plunkett's view of the impact of the Roman Catholic Church on Irish economic development is considered in some detail, in part because this fuses into a major intellectual debate that is still far from being resolved.*

This example illustrates a further point regarding presentation. I have attempted in each chapter (with the exception of the first) to give a rounded treatment of particular issues and themes, thus deviating from the more conventional pattern of a historical narrative unfolding in chronological sequence. There is necessarily some tension

* This treatment is also useful for a rather different reason. In chapter 5 I argue that the response of the R.C. clergy to the co-operative movement was not quite so enthusiastic or unambiguous as had been suggested in the writings of leading co-operators. There was some danger that these findings might have been generalised to fit into a pre-existing stream of thought that emphasised the negative implications of the Church for economic growth. The more general chapter on Church and economy (Chapter 6) hopefully dispels such notions.

between this approach and the further requirement of furnishing an intelligible historical framework. As a primarily analytical orientation can only bear the weight of a limited amount of descriptive material (otherwise it collapses into incoherence) I have provided a general introduction in Chapter I to the course of Irish co-operation over the period 1890-1914. Hopefully this acts as a historical backcloth against which the contents of later chapters are rendered more meaningful.

A not unimportant objective of this study was to explore the usefulness of theory in the reconstruction and interpretation of the past. A number of techniques, principally from economics but also from sociology, have been used in the course of this work. An interdisciplinary approach seemed especially appropriate to the study of a multi-faceted phenomenon such as the co-operative movement. While the application of these techniques imparts a leaden quality to the writing at particular points it is felt that the stylistic losses are compensated for by gains in other directions. It is hardly necessary to argue the case for an explicit methodology but a more specific point in relation to the historian may be worth adding. There is a strong case to be made for greater interest and participation by historians in the development of social theories. This would help combat some of the worst excesses of ahistorical methods. It could also lead to the development and refinement of some existing models, and there is some reason to believe social scientists would welcome such contributions. The latter point may be illustrated by reference to Chapter 3 of this thesis. Much to my surprise, the critique of an innovation decision making model contained there stimulated a stronger response than any other paper I have published. (Chapter 3 contains

a modified version of a previously published paper entitled 'Evaluation of a Model Building Approach to the Adoption of Agricultural Innovations', Journal of Agricultural Economics, XXVIII, 1977, 55-61.

Other published papers that draw on material from this thesis are 'A Sceptical View on the Reincarnation of the Irish "Gombeenman"', Economic and Social Review, VIII, (1977), 213-222 and 'Adoption of a Group Innovation in Irish Agriculture 1890-1914: an exercise in applied-history', Oxford Agrarian Studies, VI (1977), 57-70.)

Finally, I should perhaps point out that thesis regulations at the University of York do not permit footnote references at the bottom of a page. This is quite a burden in the context of historical writing and I can only regret the inconvenience caused to possible readers.

CHAPTER I

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH CO-OPERATION 1890-1914

HORACE PLUNKETT

Ireland at mid-century had hardly begun to recover from the massive tragedy of the Great Famine. Death and emigration had gouged out large portions of the population, especially among the poorer sections of rural society. In terms of population levels the country was now set on a course of long term population decline. The main political legacy of the Famine lay years ahead, but in the rural economy major changes were clearly visible. Decimation of the cottiers and labourers had altered the social balance in favour of landholders while the partly related processes of farm consolidation and expansion of cattle numbers were well under way.

Post-Famine reconstruction was aided over the following two decades or so by generally favorable price trends for agricultural commodities. Into this period of relative prosperity were fitted the childhood and early years of the father of Irish co-operation - Horace Curzon Plunkett. Horace, the third son of the sixteenth Baron Dunsany, was born in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds in 1854.¹ Of ancient Anglo-Irish stock, the Plunketts had their family seat at Dunsany Castle in county Meath. It was here that the young Plunkett spent some of the early years of his life. Following a rather melancholy childhood - Horace's mother died when he was four years old, by the time he was twelve a brother and a sister had also died - he passed through the elite institutions of Eton and Oxford to emerge in 1877 with an honours degree in history. In the following year the young graduate took an important step, one which prefigured later developments. He formed the Dunsany Co-operative Society on the family estate. This store, dealing in groceries and provisions,

was owned and controlled by his father's tenants. Though conforming only roughly to the Rochdale model of a co-operative society it was nevertheless the prototype which Plunkett later drew upon when floating his ideas for radical reorganisation of the distribution system in rural Ireland.²

Threatened with tuberculosis, the disease which had previously struck down his mother, brother and sister, Plunkett was advised to leave the damp lowlands of Meath and spend the greater part of the year in a drier climate. In mid 1879, as the dark clouds of agrarian trouble began to take shape in the west of the country, Plunkett set off for the United States of America. Fairly recently settled territories such as Wyoming were then enjoying boom conditions for cattle-raising, and it was here that the adventurous young emigrant, in conjunction with a number of partners, established himself in cattle ranching. Over the following decade Plunkett combined ranching in the Rocky Mountains and other American business ventures with frequent trips to Ireland.³ The declining Baron Dunsany leaned heavily upon the business abilities of his son in sorting out the scattered family interests in estates, coal mining, shipping, and boat building. Family circumstances, particularly the plight of his dying father, induced him eventually to abandon an active business career in the New World, though he was to retain some investments and a life-long interest in the U.S.A. Having reluctantly taken this step, the year 1888 found Plunkett more or less permanently grounded in Ireland. A restless, vigorous individual, possessed of a social idealism originally kindled at Oxford, he now sought to transfer these creative energies into Irish public life.

In the autumn of 1888 Plunkett published an article entitled "Co-operative Stores for Ireland".⁴ Arguing that high prices paid for farm and household supplies contributed strongly to the problem of rural poverty, he advocated the formation of co-operative stores along the lines of the Dunsany Society. Greater efficiency in distribution and the retention of retail margins by the members of such societies would boost the purchasing power of rural incomes. Having articulated these newly crystallised views in public for the first time, Plunkett became rapidly more enthusiastic about the ameliorative value of co-operative organisation.

At this time also the Co-operative Union - the ideological nucleus of the British co-operative movement - was developing an interest in the virgin territories of the neighbouring island.⁵ In November 1888 J.C. Gray of the Co-operative Union crossed to Ireland and had a close look at co-operative prospects. In the course of this visit he travelled to Dunsany and discussed with Plunkett the best means of introducing the system to Ireland.⁶ Later in the same month the latter attended a quarterly meeting of the Co-operative Board in Manchester and had further discussions with Gray and other leading British co-operators.⁷ These links with the British movement were formalised a year later when

at the Co-operative Congress at Ipswich an Irish Section was set up to promote the new system in Ireland.⁸

In 1889 the co-operative crusade was begun in earnest. Though Plunkett's base was at Dunsany, about twenty miles north of Dublin, the early propaganda activity was concentrated in the southern counties of Ireland. He later commented that the reason for selecting the Munster region was his (Plunkett's) belief that if co-operative schemes could be made to work there this would constitute a far more impressive vindication of their intrinsic worth than success in the more prosperous eastern counties.⁹ Whether or not there was such a pre-conceived strategy it is clear that

Plunkett's personal network of contacts in the south greatly facilitated his work there. Mary Ponsonby, his widowed sister, lived at Kilcooley Abbey in Co. Tipperary. Alexis Roche, brother of Lord Fermoy and Plunkett's business partner in American enterprises, had a residence at Old Court, Co. Waterford. More important still, Lord Monteagle who quickly channelled his philanthropic energies into co-operative work, had an estate at Foynes, Co. Limerick on which Plunkett and he sought to interest the stronger tenants in co-operation. These three "Big Houses" became for some time the foci of the new movement.¹⁰ Thus in May 1889 we find Plunkett driving out from Kilcooley seeking to interest local priests and farmers in co-operation.¹¹ An attempt to establish a creamery close to the Ponsonby demesne at Kilcooley is an early failure.¹² In July he is riding with Alexis Roche about the Doneraile area "seeing influential neighbours and talking over the possibility of starting a co-operative movement in the district".¹³ It was Roche, incidentally, who introduced Plunkett to a raw young sub-agent to Lord Castletown by the name of R.A. Anderson. One of the earliest recruits into the movement, Anderson, by dint of his great strength and drive, was to carry the co-operative message into some of the remotest corners and into virtually every county in Ireland. Shrugging off bad weather,

rough travelling conditions, and sometimes physical assault, he bore the brunt of the early organising work.¹⁴

The first society, a co-operative store, was formed in Anderson's home village of Doneraile. Some time afterwards, with the help of Lord Monteagle who "secured the presence of the parish priest and all the prominent farmers", a co-operative creamery was established at Ballyhahill, close to Monteagle's residence.¹⁵ This society was officially registered in October 1890. The very first co-operative creamery in Ireland had been formed the previous year at Drumcollogher, county Limerick by W.L. Stokes, a butter buyer for the English Co-operative Wholesale Society, and by Robert Gibson, a butter merchant in Limerick.¹⁶ These two then linked up for some time with Plunkett and Anderson in promoting co-operative societies.

It is important to note that the original aim of promoting store societies had now been broadened to include creamery societies.¹⁷ Thus early in 1890 two very different, sometimes antagonistic forms of co-operation - consumer and producer societies - were being advocated. This requires some explanation, particularly as the major emphasis was shifting swiftly towards creamery societies. The Irish dairying industry had been experiencing depressed market conditions over a prolonged period. The price of butter had fallen by almost 40% over the period 1875-90.¹⁸ This was in part due to increased supplies of butter on the British market, the traditional outlet for Irish dairy produce. In the early 1870s when butter prices were buoyant, Ireland was still the principal outside supplier. Exports to Britain averaged about 600,000 cwts. between 1870 and 1875, over one-third of total butter imports into the United Kingdom in those years.¹⁹ Butter imports into the U.K. doubled between 1870 and 1880, registered some decline in the following decade, but by the turn of the century had shown a volume increase of a further 45% over the level in 1880. In addition, substitutes such as

margarine were further intensifying competitive pressures at the lower end of the market.²⁰ The growth of butter imports from Ireland's major competitors is summarised in Table I. Most interesting, perhaps, is the rapid rise to prominence of Denmark, signifying a major reorientation of its agricultural sector. The emergence of Australasia at a somewhat later date as another major supply area is also worthy of note, reflecting as it does further integration of the world market in butter as a result of developments in transport and refrigeration techniques.

Table I. Major sources of butter imports into the United Kingdom 1870-1910, with quantities expressed in cwts.*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Sweden	10,043	71,335	224,235	196,041	345,684
Denmark	127,013	300,157	824,749	1,486,342	1,726,091
Germany	162,146	117,767	104,450	36,042	3,308
Holland	406,795	810,519	156,069	282,805	3,481
France	289,692	531,649	525,105	322,048	361,249
U.S.A.	16,915	277,790	84,553	56,046	756
Australasia	3,145	4,595	40,498	517,028	1,030,640
Russia	13,955	13,955	8,366	209,738	584,040
Total	1,159,210	2,326,305	2,027,717	3,378,516	4,325,539

Source: Annual Statement of the Trade of the United Kingdom with Foreign Countries and British Possessions (BPP, relevant years). The totals for 1870 and 1880 include some margarine imports.

But increased supplies, butter substitutes, butter-margarine mixtures were not the only factors depressing the price of Irish butter, and in consequence the income of dairy farmers. More damaging in the longer term for a country not prepared to make the necessary adjustments were the qualitative changes taking place both on the side of supply

* Selected countries only.

and that of demand. Even prior to the invention of the centrifugal separator in 1878 (which was to open the way to creamery produced butter), fresh factory-blended butter from continental Europe was flowing onto the British market.²¹ This lightly salted butter met a brisk consumer response; a taste for such butter, to the detriment of the heavily salted firkin-butter from Ireland, began to develop, though, as is to be expected there were regional lags and variations in the changing pattern of consumer demand. By the early 1880s, however, it was claimed that heavily salted butter of the firkin type was hardly saleable in the massive London market.²² The rapid diffusion of the creamery system, in Denmark in particular, posed further problems. Butter production could now be transferred from farm level to a much smaller number of centres where factory-style manufacture was possible. This cost-reducing innovation also produced a butter of more even quality, a uniformity of produce appreciated by distributors catering for a mass market. By contrast, in Ireland where the home butter-making system prevailed there was "nothing uniform about the produce, and in a hundred farms in every parish a hundred flavours originated".²³

In the 1880s the Irish dairying industry was beginning to slowly and painfully adjust to changed conditions in its trading environment. Fresh butter marts began to appear in some of the small towns, diverting supplies from other markets based on the firkin-butter trade, and feeding into butter blending factories.²⁴ In these "factories" lumps of home made butter were washed, salted, and blended together, giving a reasonably acceptable if not quality product.²⁵ In addition creameries, using the Scandinavian technique of separating cream from whole milk by means of a centrifugal separator, were slowly intruding upon the traditional dairying scene. The first instance of centralised churning of cream into butter is said to have been at Hospital in county Limerick in 1884.²⁶ This establishment, rather misleadingly called a creamery,

was promoted by a vigorous dairying enthusiast, the Rev. Canon Bagot. A short time later this Church of Ireland clergyman was instrumental in getting a further "creamery" under way at Galbally, also in the county Limerick.²⁷ Under this system farmers continued to skim the cream from the whole milk on the farm. The cream was then transported to the "creamery" where each farmer's cream was churned separately, and finally the different lots of butter were blended together. According to Stokes, whose position as a butter merchant compels respect for his judgment in this matter, the end result was a second-rate butter. These and a similar venture at Kenmare proved failures.²⁸ After 1886 some private businessmen, particularly those involved in the butter export trade (such as Dowdall Bros. of Cork for example) and also small groups of farmers, began to set up creameries based on the system of centrifugal separation.²⁹ As the final decade of the century opened, the limited extent of these changes, if not evident then, is certainly apparent in retrospect. In 1891 there were 152 "dairy factories" of varying degrees of sophistication operating in the country; within a few short years this number had increased very substantially to reach a level of 255 (in 1895)*. But the latter figure was still less than one-third of the level actually achieved a decade later when suitable dairying districts were practically saturated with creameries (see appendix).

* Agricultural Statistics of Ireland for the year 1891 (BPP, 1892, LXXVIII), p. 306; Agricultural Statistics 1895 (BPP, 1896, XCII), p. 331. (The totals for numbers of plants include a few condensed milk factories).

FROM CO-OPERATION TO A DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

By 1890 a major acceleration in the rate of dairy reorganisation was overdue. Plunkett, who initially had no thought of applying the co-operative principle to the dairying industry, perceived the opportunity and reoriented his tiny campaign accordingly.³⁰ The following five years or so embrace the period of early, robustious, and largely unsystematic attempts at propagating the co-operative system. This formative period is of such importance both in terms of farmers' reaction to the co-operative innovation and the wider implications of this behaviour, that these issues are subjected to detailed treatment in the following chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to note that chiefly as a result of the field activities of Anderson, now a full-time organiser financed by the Co-operative Union, the movement was making good progress. In 1890 there was one co-operative creamery in Ireland. In the following year the number had risen to 17. In 1892 there existed 25 and in 1893 some 30 such societies.³¹

Plunkett had been conscious from the outset of the need for a permanent organisational and ideological structure at national level to guide and co-ordinate developments at local level.³² On the 18 April 1894 he convened in Dublin a meeting that was to inaugurate the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Attended by about 250 people from various walks of Irish life, it was successful in fusing nationalist and unionist, Protestant and Roman Catholic into an association dedicated "to work together for what they believe[d] to be the welfare of the agricultural classes".³³ A further meeting was held on the 10 May to arrange the election of a committee for the new body.³⁴ A small but potentially serious crisis emerged on the morning of the meeting. One rabid unionist objected that if the various individuals who had been

nominated were elected to the committee then the nationalists would have a majority of one. The problem was smoothed over by the magnanimous gesture of one of the candidates who readily agreed to efface himself, thus ensuring a delicate political equilibrium.³⁵ Plunkett became first president of the society, while Anderson was appointed chief organiser and secretary at a salary of £400 per annum.³⁶ The committee contained, among others, two prominent Roman Catholic clergymen, Dr. O'Donnell the Bishop of Raphoe, and the Rev. T.A. Finlay. O'Donnell was also a member of the Congested Districts Board, as indeed was Plunkett. Finlay, a tough outspoken Jesuit, had discussed agricultural co-operation with Plunkett early in 1892,³⁷ and not long afterwards was actively involved in promoting the system in Ireland. Having previously studied co-operation in Germany and France, he was to make an outstanding contribution to the movement in Ireland. When a co-operative newspaper, the Irish Homestead, was started the following year Finlay became its first editor. For more than a quarter century he acted as vice-president of the I.A.O.S.

Plunkett, though he regarded co-operation or self-help as furnishing the fundamental building blocks for agricultural prosperity (and ultimately the creation of a vibrant rural social order), nevertheless insisted that the state had also an important role to play.³⁸ The two were essentially complementary, each enhancing the effectiveness of the other. Following the successful launching of the I.A.O.S., Plunkett now sought to implement further stages of his thinking. The chosen instrument was an all-party conference composed of leading representatives from the nationalist and unionist camps. This proposal, issued through the medium of a letter to the newspapers, elicited a remarkably favourable reaction³⁹ (and thus deprived some future historian, gifted with perfect hindsight, of the measured judgment that such a naive suggestion was foredoomed, being one more instance of Plunkett's impracticality).⁴⁰

Though Justin M'Carthy, leader of the main body of nationalist M.P.'s condemned the proposal, claiming it was designed to seek a substitute for Home Rule,⁴¹ the committee managed to get off the ground during the parliamentary recess in the autumn of 1895. Fortunately a sufficient number of nationalists and unionists participated in the work of the committee to confer on it a status that elevated its proceedings above the level of narrow party politics. John Redmond M.P. and the Parnellite wing of the nationalist movement were co-operative, as were a number of prominent unionists, while the rejection of the all-party committee idea by such intransigent unionists as Colonel Saunderson M.P. represented a constructive contribution from that quarter. In less than a year the committee, popularly known as the Recess Committee, brought in a unanimous report.⁴² Basing its proposals on a study of policy measures and agricultural developments in a number of European countries, it recommended: creation of a department of agriculture, assisted by an appointed agricultural board and a more broadly based advisory council; a new emphasis on technical education; direct state intervention in areas of industry and fishing. The report also endorsed the value of the principle of self-help and voluntary organisation, and envisaged a complementary relationship between state agencies and organised self-help groups.

The report was favourably received in official and popular circles but it was not until 1899 that a major part of its recommendations was embodied in legislation.⁴³ A new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction was inaugurated and Plunkett became its first vice-president (effectively head of the department) in November of that year. The new institution took over some of the functions which, in the absence of an appropriate state body, had been performed by the I.A.O.S.⁴⁴ The dissemination of technical information to farmers is a case in point. Even at this early stage tensions began to develop between the two

agencies.⁴⁵ Claims of overlapping between the work of the I.A.O.S. and the Department bred mutual suspicion, while such demarcation disputes were accentuated by personality clashes. Anderson and Professor Campbell, assistant-secretary of D.A.T.I., for instance, were not even on speaking terms at times.⁴⁶ Clearly these skirmishes did not help the work of either agency but, while Plunkett spanned the spheres of self-help and state aid, serious conflict was unlikely.

A major controversy did erupt in 1904, but this focused mainly on Plunkett himself. The row centred on a book by Sir Horace (he had been knighted the previous year) entitled Ireland in the New Century. Though it was mainly concerned with analysing the factors contributing to underdevelopment in Ireland and outlining remedial measures, the book also contained a chapter entitled "The Influence of Religion upon Secular Life in Ireland". Plunkett was firmly of the view that strengthening the national character was a necessary precondition for economic and cultural progress. One of the major formative influences on Irish character (the others singled out for extended treatment were the political parties and the educational system) was the Roman Catholic Church. Plunkett examined critically the activities of the church, its vast building programmes, and in particular its effect on Irish character. He concluded: "I still think that, with their unquestioned authority in religion, and their almost equally undisputed influence in education, the Roman Catholic clergy cannot be exonerated from some responsibility in regard to Irish character as we find it to-day".⁴⁷

The tone and argument of the offending chapter display considerable fair-mindedness⁴⁸ (especially when contrasted with the politico-religious writings of the time), while the book itself represents an important intellectual achievement. Such qualities, however, could not be expected to guarantee the work a dispassionate reading from the prickly custodians of Catholic and nationalist sentiment. Clergymen and

politicians, sometimes on the basis of second-hand accounts, rushed to decry Plunkett's picture of selected aspects of Irish Catholic life.⁴⁹ George Russell in the co-operative paper, the Irish Homestead, waged a lonely struggle for a calmer discussion of the contentious issues, but to little avail.⁵⁰ The controversy rolled on into the summer and early autumn of 1904 before finally fading from public debate. R.A. Anderson had been surely correct in advising Plunkett in advance to drop the controversial chapter.⁵¹ The whole episode left behind residues of ill-feeling and distrust which might be later exploited by hostile critics of the rural reform movement when suitable opportunities arose.

Early in October, in the immediate aftermath of the book controversy, a stinging attack on co-operation was unloosed by the nationalist leader, John Redmond M.P. Redmond, it will be remembered, had participated in the deliberations of the Recess Committee and had also been a member of the committee of the I.A.O.S. during the first few years of its existence.⁵² It is not clear when he became actively opposed to the co-operative movement. He had early been made aware of the ripples of discord co-operative developments could set up in his home constituency.⁵³ It is probable though that after the reunification of the Parnellite and anti-Parnellite groups of nationalists in 1900, he imbibed in greater measure some of John Dillon's notorious hostility to forms of "constructive unionism" such as Plunkett earnestly sought to promote.⁵⁴ In any case, the terms of his attack were sweeping:⁵⁵

... Sir Horace Plunkett's recent book, full as it is of undisguised contempt for the Irish race, makes it plain to me that the real object of the movement in question is to undermine the National Party and divert the minds of our people from Home Rule, which is the only thing which can ever lead to a real revival of Irish industries.

This, in essence, was the formal view of the nationalist party on agricultural co-operation. Such growing criticism of the co-operative movement in general, and Plunkett in particular, boded ill for the

future. A major convulsion in the body politic was imminent, as more than a quarter century of largely Conservative rule was drawing to a close.

In spite of the opposition of politicians and vested interests the co-operative movement had, however, grown vigorously. In the decade 1895-1905 creamery societies had expanded seven fold, reaching a total of 275 by 1905.⁵⁶ Agricultural societies for the group purchase of farm inputs attained an impressive total of 151 in the same year.⁵⁷ However, this figure tends to inflate their significance given that the turnover of many of these societies was low, fixed assets slight, and their activity intermittent. Quite remarkable progress had been made in the promotion of credit societies. Having sought expert advice on how co-operative credit systems worked in other countries, the I.A.O.S. decided to experiment with this type of society at Doneraile.⁵⁸ The model used was the German Raiffeisen system based on the unlimited liability of the members.⁵⁹ The Doneraile Society commenced in 1895, and in the following year two further societies were established, one at Kyle, near Roscrea, and the other on the bleak peninsula of Belmullet in the west of Ireland.⁶⁰ In 1897 the poet, writer, and mystic George Russell was recruited as a co-operative organiser, and in November of that year was despatched to the west to promote credit societies.⁶¹ His success was striking. Within a few months he succeeded in starting societies in six places in county Mayo and at Carna, Rossmuck, and Spiddal in the neighbouring county of Galway.⁶² The I.A.O.S. were delighted: "We attach very great importance to the introduction of the Raiffeisen system into Ireland, and are inclined to put it in the forefront of our propaganda".⁶³ Credit societies now constituted the fastest growing section of the movement, 33 further societies being added in the following (financial) year.⁶⁴ Because of the kind of areas in which these societies were taking root, principally the poorer districts of the mid and north-west, it was also deemed

necessary to appoint an Irish speaking organiser who might explain "the principles of these Banks in districts where English is little spoken or understood".⁶⁵ By 1905, when A.E. was becoming principally occupied with work for the Irish Homestead, there were 232 credit societies, not far short of the number of co-operative creameries in the country.⁶⁶

THE I.A.O.S.

The I.A.O.S. had been struggling financially since its inception in 1894. The inaugural meeting had generated sufficient funds to launch a permanent organisation but, as the number of co-operative societies increased and the range of activities broadened, the I.A.O.S. found itself experiencing severe and recurrent financial crises. Within a few years the central body was on the point of bankruptcy, being saved by a gift of £5,000 in 1897 from Sir Henry Cochrane, a Dublin manufacturer.⁶⁷ Two years later the situation had become so unsatisfactory that it was resolved that no assistance would be given to co-operative societies that had not affiliated to the parent body and paid the appropriate fee. Moderate fees, proportional to the turnover of societies (10s. per £1,000 turnover in the case of creameries), were fixed. It is not without significance that a number of societies refused to affiliate as a result of these terms.⁶⁸ A body designed to promote self-help and self-reliance again found itself forced to lean heavily on the charity of a number of wealthy individuals. The irony of this situation was not lost on the leading co-operators.

With the coming of D.A.T.I. the financial position of the I.A.O.S. improved. Prior to the founding of D.A.T.I. the I.A.O.S. had attempted to provide a wide range of technical and educational services in addition to its primary responsibility of organising co-operatives.

Such activities, falling more naturally within the domain of the new department, were gradually shed by the I.A.O.S., thus lightening its financial burden. Where particular functions could not be transferred immediately, D.A.T.I. bore the cost of their continued operation.⁶⁹ As well as this, Plunkett anonymously donated his salary as vice-president of D.A.T.I. to the I.A.O.S. while Lord Dunsany added a further substantial contribution.⁷⁰ Unfortunately this philanthropy was not matched by contributions from the constituent units of the movement, the co-operative societies. While in 1902 the turnover of societies exceeded £1 million, fees from affiliated societies totalled a mere £623.⁷¹ The I.A.O.S. estimated it required an income of £5,000 per annum, quite apart from state aid, to function effectively in this period.⁷²

In 1904 a major reorganisation and democratisation of the I.A.O.S. was effected. The affiliated societies could now elect the bulk of the members of the committee.⁷³ As originally envisaged, the transition from a philanthropic body to one representative of the various co-operative societies would be made within five years of the establishment of the I.A.O.S.⁷⁴ Because of grass roots apathy on the issue paternalistic control had to be extended for the first decade of the life of the I.A.O.S. The prospect of fuller participation by the societies in the policy-making and control of the I.A.O.S. did not evoke an enthusiastic financial response. Though a proposal to limit the affiliation fee paid by any one society to a maximum of £5, irrespective of turnover, was defeated, it was abundantly clear that the societies were not prepared to pay anything like the full cost of maintaining the parent body.⁷⁵ A sub-committee of the I.A.O.S. under W.E. Holmes, a Roscommon land-agent, succeeded in collecting some £7,750, but despite these voluntary donations it was felt necessary to approach D.A.T.I. for financial aid in 1905.⁷⁶ After some initial reluctance this request was acceded to,

though on the stringent condition that "non-controversial co-operation" only was promoted.⁷⁷ It may be remarked that since its foundation the I.A.O.S. had manifested a keen sensitivity (if not always tact) to the opposition of vested interests and the idea of consumer co-operative stores - the most controversial form of co-operation - had found no place in the organisation's programme. Ardent co-operators like Anderson had resented this restraint:⁷⁸

... however much we might curtail our programme, we were hated and feared by a large section of the traders, who always perceived the danger of the co-operative store lurking in the shadow of the creameries and the credit societies. They could not have hated us any more if we had gone out boldly on a whole-hog co-operative campaign.

Reliance on public money, with its concomitant of close supervision of I.A.O.S. expenditure and activities had a further inhibiting effect. Despite the costs implicit in such a state of affairs, the I.A.O.S. was again forced to seek a somewhat larger grant from the Department in 1906. Agricultural politics now burst into life around the issue;⁷⁹ the grant was eventually conceded but the triumph was shortlived. The balance of power within the Department's decision-making machinery, already delicately poised on this issue, was about to tilt decisively against the co-operators and their sympathisers.

Plunkett's position as vice-president of D.A.T.I., falling as it did within the sphere of political appointments, became extremely vulnerable in the wake of the massive Liberal victory of 1906. Irish nationalist M.P.s clamoured for a purge.⁸⁰ At first indecisive (Plunkett as procreator and mid-wife of D.A.T.I. presumably merited more than swift ejection and a curt valediction), the new administration finally sought Plunkett's resignation in the spring of 1907.⁸¹ His successor was T.W. Russell M.P., a strong advocate of tenant right, a vigorous critic of landlordism, and an implacable foe of co-operation.⁸² Russell resolved to break all ties linking D.A.T.I. and the I.A.O.S., and indeed from this time onward to the end of our period pre-existing

frictions between the two institutions were escalated into confrontations of a bitter and prolonged kind. These conflicts are considered more fully later as such rancorous encounters illustrate the kind of political constraints that helped shape Irish co-operation.

The loss of a subsidy from D.A.T.I. threw the I.A.O.S. back on its own resources. Shock and anger induced a brief upsurge of co-operative enthusiasm, a new spirit of independence. Some co-operators such as A.E. and Fr. Finlay spoke in public of the purifying effect of the break.⁸³ However by 1909 the I.A.O.S. was in severe financial difficulties; private charity was again mobilised to bridge the expenditure-revenue gap.⁸⁴ While in the following years leading up to the Great War contributions from the affiliated societies showed an appreciable upward trend, such contributions still covered only 20% of expenditure in 1914.⁸⁵

It would be mistaken though to attempt to infer the progress of the local societies from the crisis pathway traced by the parent body. This progress at the level of creamery, credit, and agricultural societies is now briefly reviewed.

THE CREAMERIES

The development of the co-operative creamery system since the foundation of the I.A.O.S. is summarised in the following table. The spatial pattern to creamery development is indicated by Figures 1 and 2. Data in these and subsequent tables and figures mapping out the quantitative features of co-operative diffusion are derived from the annual reports of the I.A.O.S. (relevant years).

Figure 1. Spatial distribution of co-operative creameries formed prior to the establishment of the I.A.O.S.

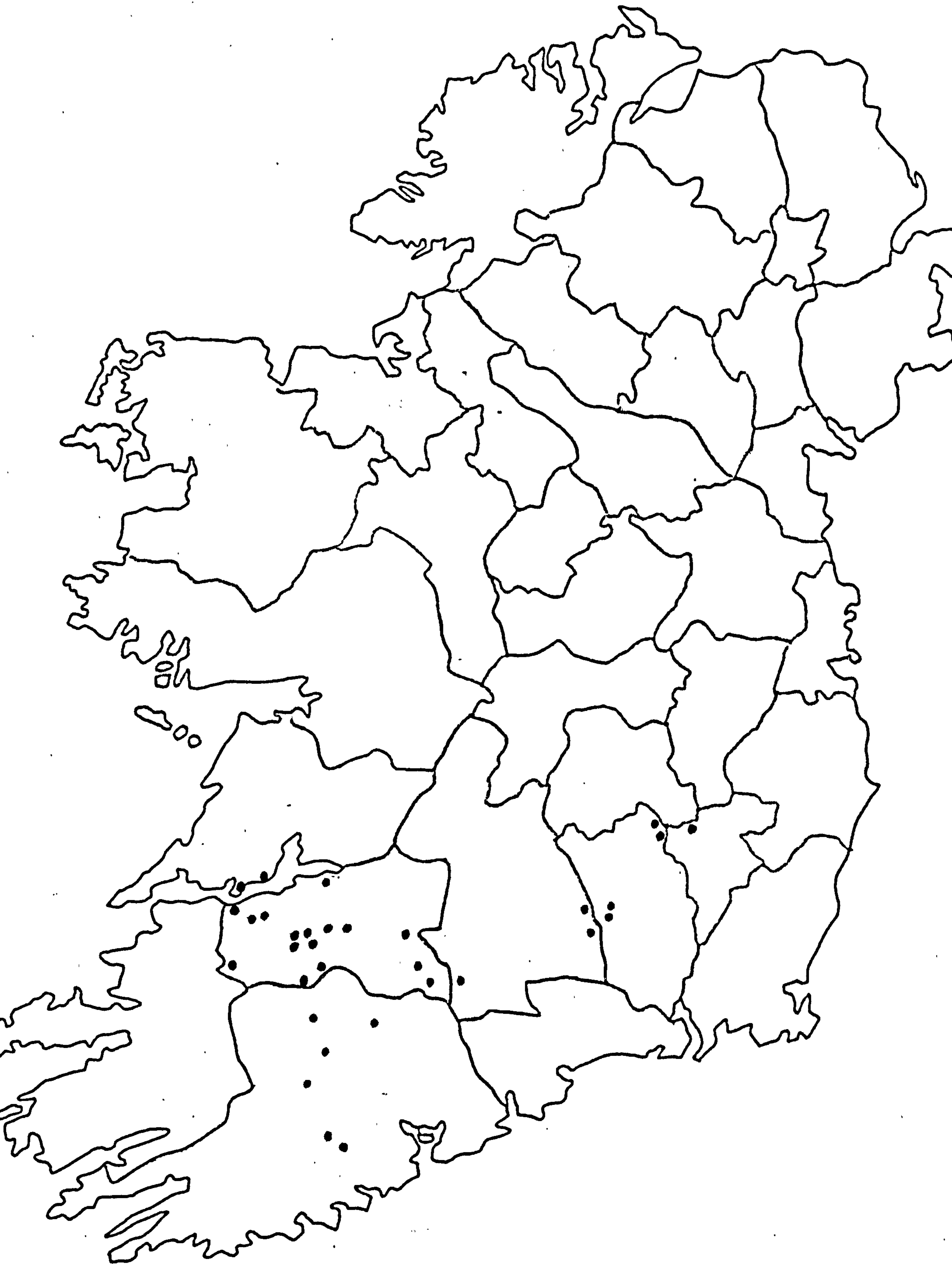


Figure 2. The number of co-operative creameries in each county in 1914.

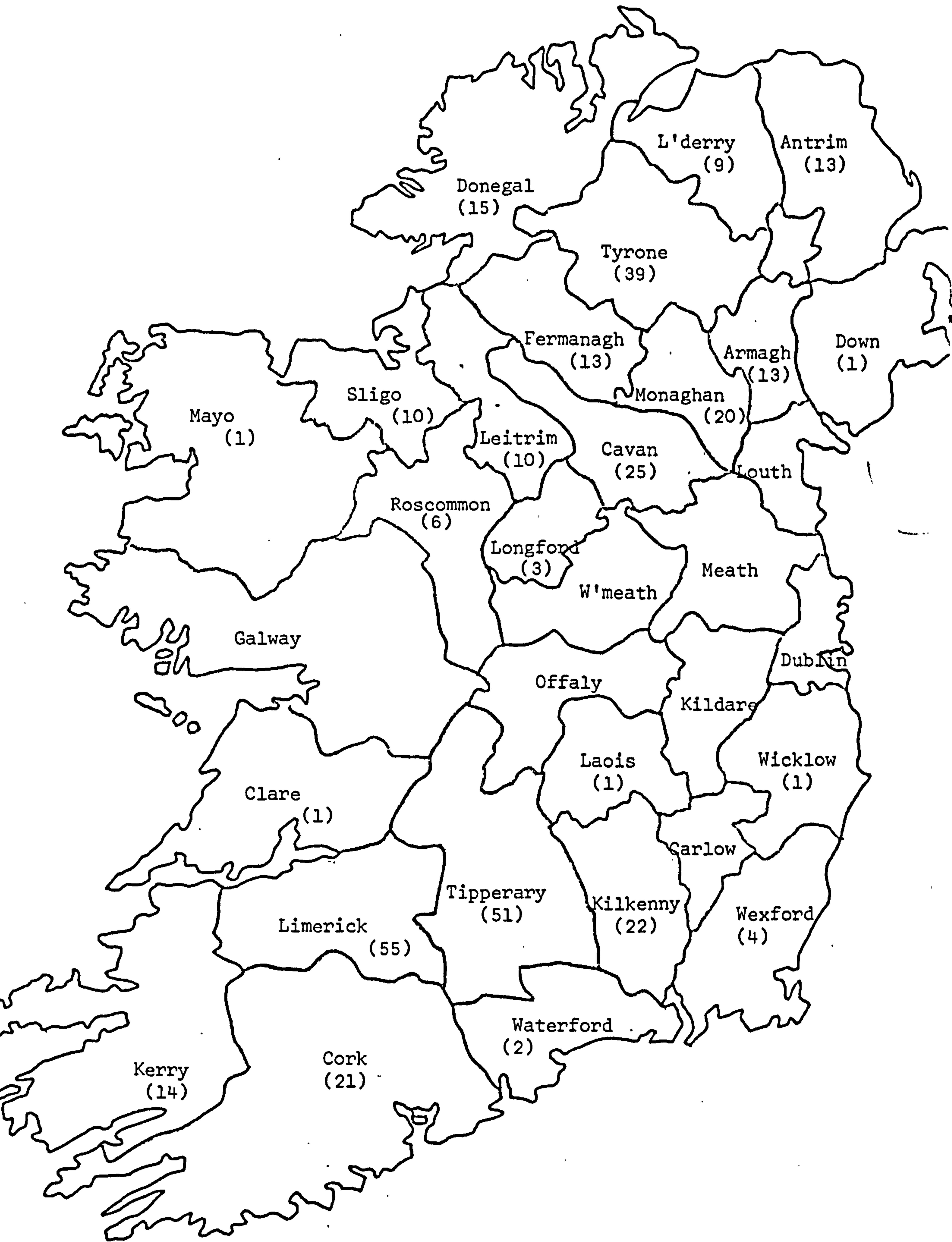


Table 3. The development of the co-operative creamery system 1894-1914

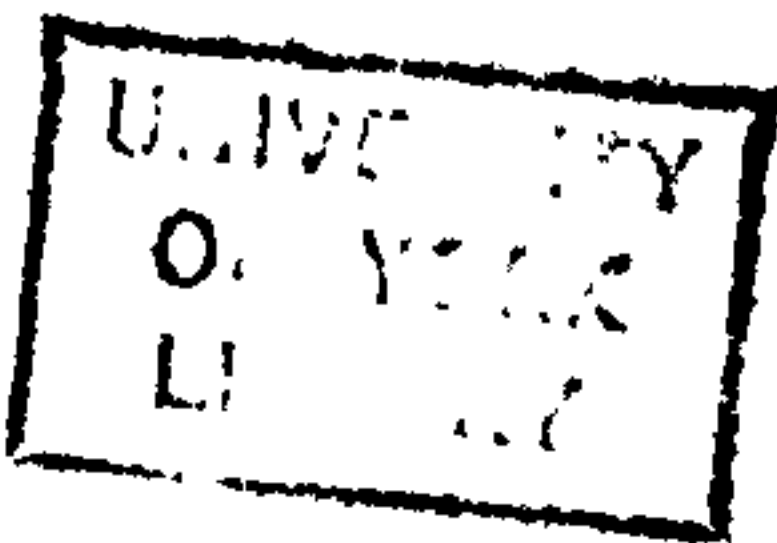
Year	Number	Members	Paid-up share capital	Loan capital	Turnover
			£	£	£
1894	30	1641	15468	6061	151852
1899	171	26577	74223	46262	728000
1904	217	42432	112296	112070	1089620
1909	301	44213	138254	111365	1841400
1914	350	47086	149755	133210	2731628

Lest it be thought that the dairying industry in Ireland had been totally transformed along co-operative lines, it is necessary to emphasise the existence of a strong proprietary sector (see appendix) and also the persistence of home butter making in areas where the milch-cow density was insufficient to support a creamery as such. Anderson estimated that a minimum of 500 cows within two and a half miles of a creamery was necessary to make the new system of butter production viable.⁸⁶ Dairying areas, such as west Cork and Clare, having low milch cow densities were unable to profitably adopt the creamery innovation.⁸⁷

Table 4. The number of dairy factories and their ownership form in 1895

		Ownership Form		
	Number of Factories	Proprietary	Joint Stock	Co-operative Farmers
Leinster	39	25	2	12
Munster	205	85	70	50
Ulster	8	7	1	-
Connaught	3	2	1	-
Ireland	255	119	74	62

Source: Agricultural Statistics of Ireland for the year 1895 (BPP, 1896 XCII), p. 331.



The I.A.O.S. had waged a bitter fight against private enterprise creameries, and it is probable that the pace of creamery development owed something to competition between the rival forms of organisation. Certainly Anderson kept a keen eye on the opposition, as a letter of his to the president of the Kilmactranny society bears out. Requesting a list of areas in which Lonsdales (a private creamery group) were considering starting creameries, Anderson intended to launch a pre-emptive strike by organising farmers' meetings in the same areas.⁸⁸ A special leaflet "Home Rule in the Dairy" was distributed to convince farmers of the benefit of controlling dairy processing themselves rather than leaving it in the hands of outsiders. Complaining that out of a total of about 250 creameries in Munster in 1898 only 64 were co-operatives (the remainder being owned by an assortment of individuals, joint-stock companies, firms of provision dealers and butter merchants, and the English Co-operative Wholesale Society), the I.A.O.S. suggested that the suppliers to such proprietary concerns should form themselves into co-operative societies to negotiate price and other conditions of supply.⁸⁹ This was quite a sensible proposal, at least as viewed from the side of the unorganised farmers, given the possibilities of monopsonistic practices inherent in the milk-processing business. Some contemporaries claimed that the I.A.O.S. was creating an "atmosphere of terror",⁹⁰ but the charge has an apologetic ring to it. The scramble for milk districts and competition for milk supplies while resulting in excess processing capacity in some areas,⁹¹ also ensured that farmers benefited from the bidding up of milk prices. These pressures also prevented management performance slipping too much.

A cross-current in the struggle between co-operatives and private creameries is furnished by the action of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (C.W.S.) which had begun to "invade" the Irish dairying area in 1895.⁹² A few years earlier, at the Co-operative Congress at Lincoln

in 1891, the chairman of the C.W.S. had signalled the intention of building creameries in Ireland, thus extending consumer co-operative control backwards to the source of supply for part of its butter requirements.⁹³ Plunkett and Anderson, who sought an indigenous producer controlled system of co-operation for agricultural produce, vehemently fought the proposal. At the 1895 Co-operative Congress the issue blazed into prominence again.⁹⁴ Some English co-operators were opposed on principle to the expansionist plans of the C.W.S. but these constituted a minority.⁹⁵ The previous year Castlemahon creamery, which was owned co-operatively but operated on very unco-operative lines, had been temporarily rented to the C.W.S. as a way out of its difficulties. After a year on this system the management committee, still paralysed by political dissension, decided to dissolve the society. The creamery was sold to the C.W.S. for £850.⁹⁶

The C.W.S. then expanded its activities rapidly, establishing a chain of creameries in the Munster counties.⁹⁷ According to W.L. Stokes, originally one of Plunkett's band of co-operative organisers but now one of the chief architects of the C.W.S. plans, it was decided that "in the erection of those Creameries no expense should be spared, and that, so far as practicable, they should be models in every respect of the word ..."⁹⁸ These sentiments must have later haunted Stokes and the C.W.S. officials involved in the Irish venture. The investment was badly conceived, the creameries appear to have been poorly managed and supervised, and the end result was a resounding failure.⁹⁹ Eventually the company decided to cut its losses and after a conciliatory conference with the I.A.O.S. in January 1909 the C.W.S. agreed to gradually transfer its creameries to farmer control.¹⁰⁰ Before extricating itself from its entanglements in the Irish creamery business the C.W.S. was estimated to have lost in excess of £100,000.¹⁰¹

CREDIT SOCIETIES

The "Gombeenman", usually a trader combining retailing and allegedly usurious moneylending practices, occupies a hallowed place in the demonology of co-operators. Rural reformers regarded the co-operative credit society as their major instrument in combatting this economic abuse. As the secretary of the Doneraile Society put it:¹⁰²

The 'Gombeen' man's trade has fallen off very perceptibly since the bank started, the borrowers repeatedly bearing testimony to the advantages of the bank over the 'usurer', many of them saying 'tis money for nothing'. I may also say that none of our borrowers could be accommodated in the local joint stock bank, as they had little or no bankable security to offer.

After the success of the pioneering society at Doneraile and George Russell's effective proselytising in the west of Ireland in the closing years of the century, this component of agricultural co-operation seemed set to overshadow developments in the creamery sector. The apparent potential of credit societies fired the leading co-operators' imagination. Quoting the report of Fr. Gleeson, of Kyle Society, Plunkett stated:¹⁰³

'The bank at Kyle, which had now been two years working, was an untold blessing to his poor people. It enabled them to have the blessings of cheap credit, and cheap credit under conditions which fostered their spirit of industry and thrift. It not only kept the money of the country in the country, but the money of the locality in the locality, where it fructified in developing agriculture and industry.'

Indeed Plunkett was later to say that if they were back in 1889 and the co-operative movement was being launched all over again, they would first concentrate on credit societies.¹⁰⁴

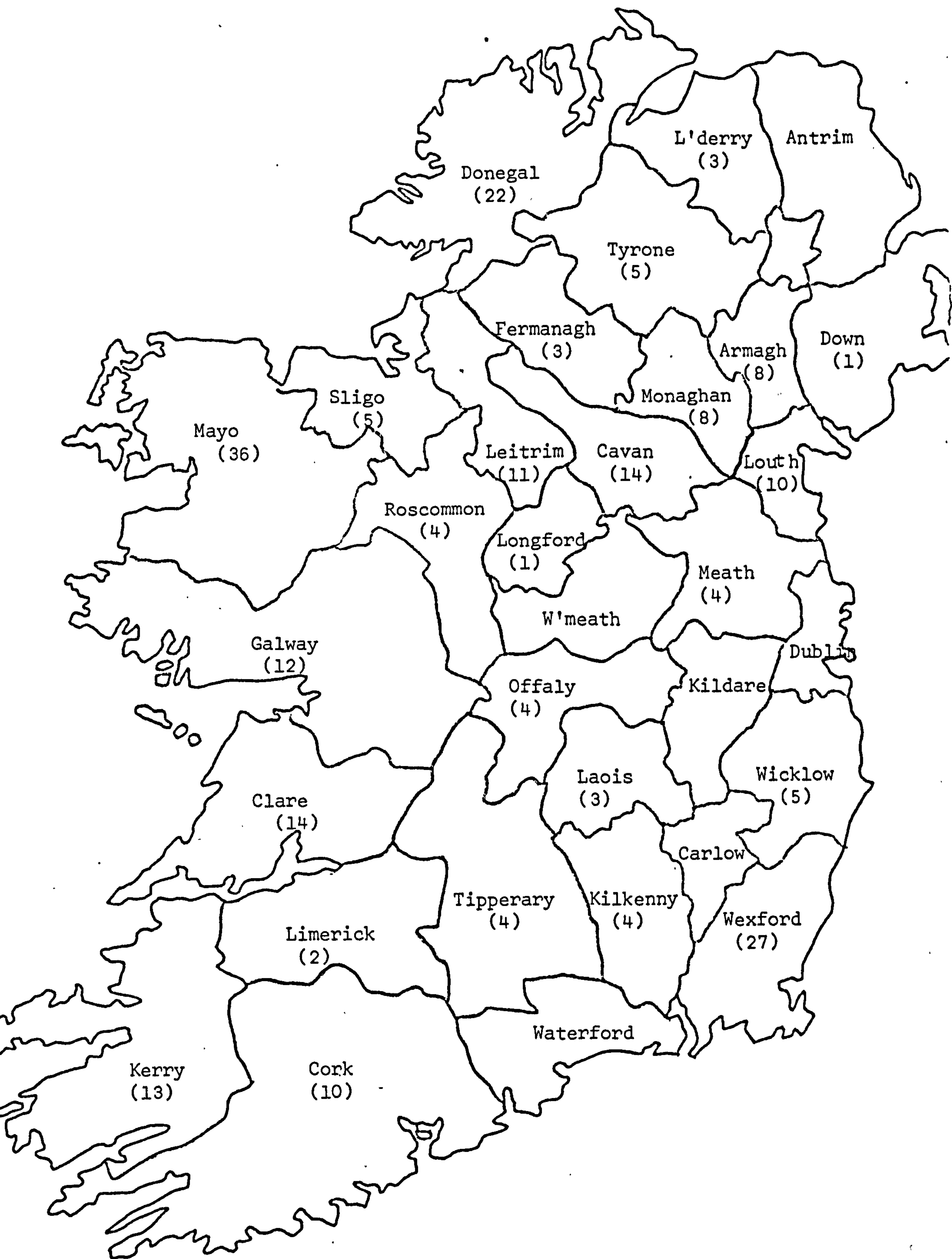
Table 5. The development of the co-operative credit system 1897-1915

Number	Members	Loan capital £	Deposits	Amount of loan £	Number of loans	Reserve fund £	Year
3	-	278	-	-	388	-	1897
145	5597	13,957	-	15,447	3241	-	1902
261	14875	31,620	17,098	53,112	9046	2,671	1907
234	20044	31,738	30,468	58,244	8522	4,492	1912
225	20260	15,602	37,182	48,197	6301	4,830	1915

As table 5 shows in the first decade or so during which credit societies were being propagated a phenomenal growth rate was achieved. This expansion was greatly facilitated by the willingness of the joint-stock banks, after some initial reserve, to advance loans to societies and also by the policies of D.A.T.I. and the Congested Districts Board in providing loan capital.¹⁰⁵ But then, after initial success in growth terms, stagnation and eventually decline set in. It is also clear from Figure 3 that credit societies were largely imprisoned within a particular regional context. From about 1905 onwards there are increasing criticisms from the I.A.O.S. of lack of punctuality in repaying loans, and a tendency to renew loans too easily.¹⁰⁶ Greater supervision of the societies by the central co-operative body was clearly necessary. It is hardly surprising though that the I.A.O.S., short of funds, deprived of state aid, and circumscribed by an official environment that exuded hostility to its activities, should fail either to adequately supervise existing societies or promote new ones. Indeed in 1909-10 forty-one credit societies were dissolved, marking a high point in the policy of retrenchment forced upon the I.A.O.S.¹⁰⁷

In 1910 the difficulties of the co-operative credit societies were further compounded by an indiscriminate attack on the system by T.W. Russell, at the January meeting of the Congested Districts Board.¹⁰⁸ Russell, it will be remembered, was both the effective head of D.A.T.I. and also a member of the C.D.B. Describing the credit system as "rotten" he claimed that if wound up many of the societies would not realise 2s. and 6d. in the pound.¹⁰⁹ There would thus be heavy losses to D.A.T.I. and the C.D.B. on the loans they had previously advanced to such societies. At the May meeting of the C.D.B. Russell claimed that several thousand pounds had to be recovered from societies with the aid of legal action, and predicted substantial bad debts on loans outstanding.¹¹⁰ The I.A.O.S. demanded greater detail, particularly as public funds were involved.¹¹¹

Figure 3. The number of co-operative credit societies in each county in 1914.



Russell refused. In the ensuing controversy in the press, Russell reiterated his charges but steadfastly refused to name any of the societies falling within the scope of his remarks. Under pressure, he rather disingenuously shifted the terms of the argument and revived an old charge that the I.A.O.S. was "identified with hostility to a political party and to certain trading interests".¹¹² Russell's letter, published in the Irish Times, drew a stern rebuke from the editor of the paper. Utterly unrepentant, Russell decided early in 1912 to set up a formal inquiry into credit societies and issues relating to agricultural credit. The findings of the inquiry did not bear out the vice-president's gloomy assessments.¹¹³

Before concluding this section it may be helpful to identify precisely the sources of capital drawn on by the credit societies:

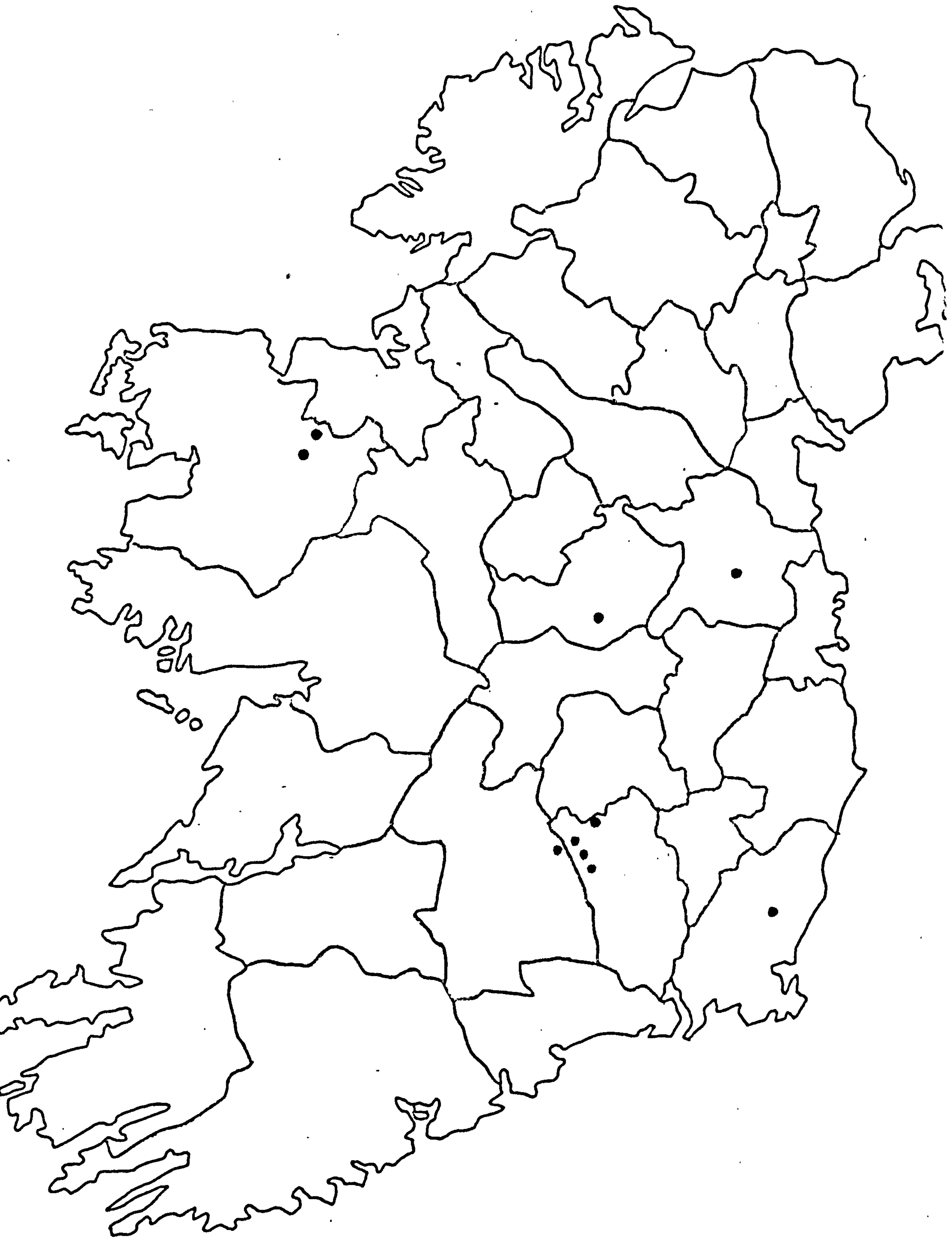
Joint Stock Banks	£15,000
Depositors	£20,000
D.A.T.I.	£12,000
C.D.B.	<u>£6,000</u>
Total	£53,000

This was at the end of 1908, and the position was substantially the same in 1910, with the important qualification that roughly £2,000 had been repaid to D.A.T.I.¹¹⁴ It is clear from this breakdown of the source of funds that D.A.T.I. was a minority supplier of capital and, even more significantly, the confidence of the commercial banks (who had no special mission to develop agriculture) is also manifested by their considerable lending to the societies. One indication of the credit-worthiness of these co-operatives is furnished by Micks, first secretary of the C.D.B. and later historian of that body. Over the period 1898-1910 loans totalling £7,345 were advanced by the C.D.B. to credit societies. When recalled the sum advanced was repaid with interest, with the exception of 3s. and 1d. (as to which the Board's claim was not clear).¹¹⁵

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES

Agricultural co-operative societies concerned themselves mainly with the bulk purchase of fertilisers, agricultural seeds, and feeding stuffs.¹¹⁶ The first budding of this form of co-operation was along the Tipperary-Kilkenny border in 1894 (see Fig. 4).¹¹⁶ These societies, by combining their resources, succeeded in forcing down the price of artificial manures by over 30% after what has been described as "the first pitched battle with the organised middlemen, and also the first effort at federation for trade purposes".¹¹⁷ With further progress on the front of co-operative purchase, the wider impact of these initiatives was a general lowering of fertiliser prices and the collapse of the manure manufacturers' cartel.¹¹⁸ The Irish trade in artificial manures amounted annually to about £400,000. Thus the reduction in price effected - in the order of 25% - would imply a saving of about £100,000 per annum to all farmers.¹¹⁹

Figure 4. Spatial distribution of co-operative agricultural societies in 1895.



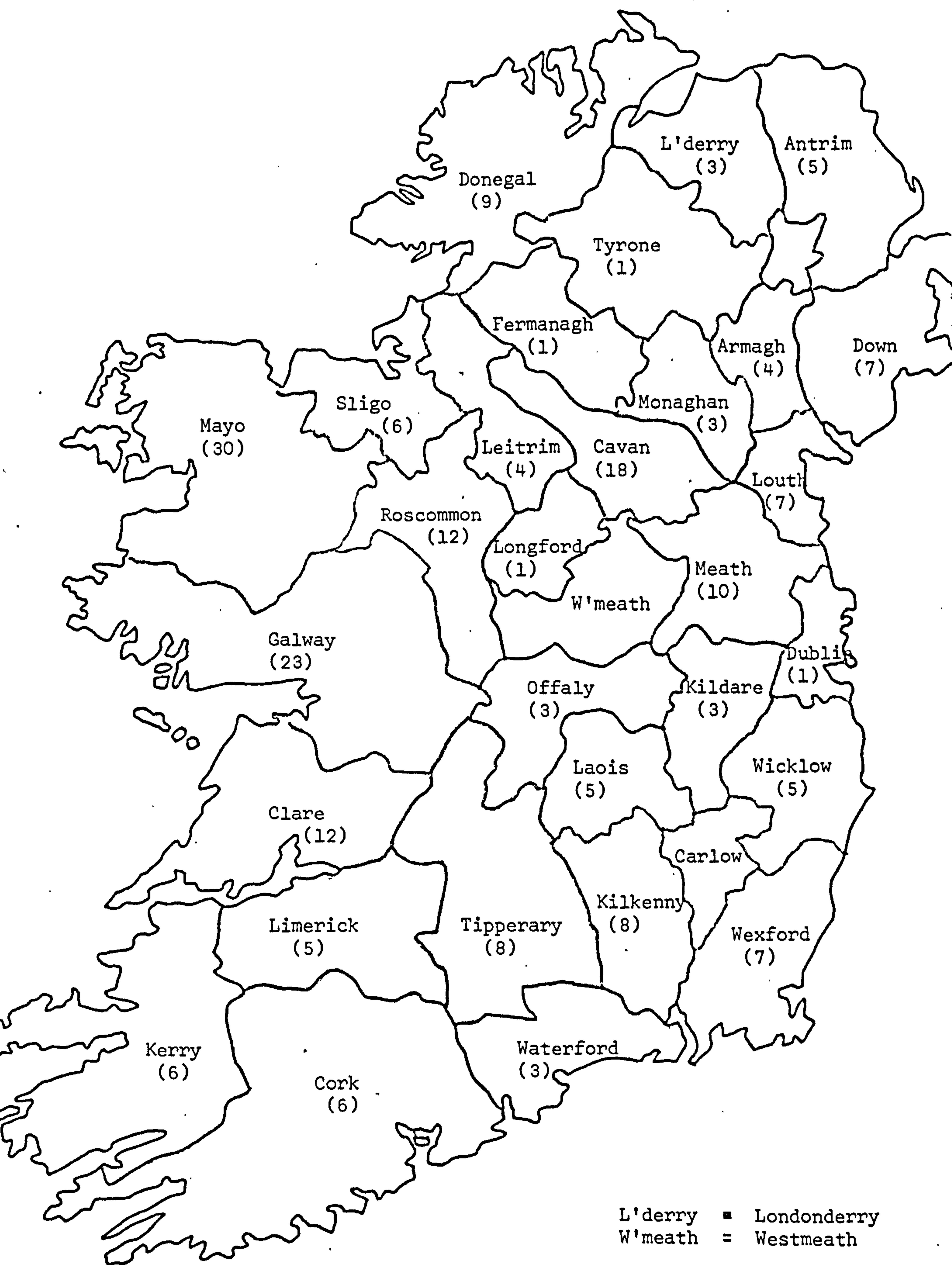
Despite this auspicious beginning, agricultural societies never occupied a leading role in the distribution network for agricultural inputs.¹²⁰ Few developed substantial fixed premises, while many lay dormant for much of the year. Members would come together in the springtime to assess their needs for the coming season, bulk their orders, and organise purchase and distribution of their requirements. These relatively simple procedures required no elaborate capital fixtures or technical skills (unlike creamery co-operation for instance). In some instances societies had little more than a paper existence. The members would seek tenders from wholesalers and then use these quotations for bargaining purposes with a local retailer. Clearly such limited, though useful institutions could not contribute powerfully to the gleaming edifice of rural organisation envisaged by the co-operative pioneers.

The progress of these societies is summarised in table 6, while Fig. 5 indicates their geographical distribution. The source of the data is again the I.A.O.S.'s annual reports (relevant years).

Table 6. The development of agricultural co-operative societies.

Number	Members	Paid-up share capital	Loan capital	Turnover	Year
		£	£	£	
38	3,000	1,639	1,124	39,741	1896
112	11,695	3,053	11,285	71,704	1901
159	13,063	5,553	29,812	72,175	1906
171	18,271	6,836	40,672	129,199	1911
222	21,155	11,343	46,708	197,146	1914
219	23,450	31,734	52,187	310,341	1915

Figure 5. The number of co-operative agricultural societies in each county in 1914.



MISCELLANEOUS SOCIETIES

Creamery, agricultural, and credit societies represent the bulk of the agricultural co-operative movement in Ireland. However the co-operative principle was also applied, with varying degrees of success, to other areas of the rural economy. Egg production, based on Irish fowl of dubious pedigree whose "chief characteristic was a ripe and unprofitable old age", suffered from problems of dirtiness, staleness, and inefficient marketing.¹²¹ Attempts to organise the collection, grading, and marketing of eggs and poultry along co-operative lines met only slight success. One friendly observer concluded in 1917 that "thus far experience would indicate that Irishwomen are far less co-operative than Irishmen".¹²² The following table shows the position of these societies in 1915.

Table 7. The position of egg and poultry co-operatives in 1915.

No. of societies	Members	Capital	Turnover
13*	4,042	£3,743	£84,922

* About a half of these did not furnish details of their capital or turnover, either through indifference or because they were defunct.

Another venture which was taken up at the beginning of this century was the promotion of flax societies.¹²³ This form of society was most relevant to the northern counties, with their long established tradition in the cultivation and working of flax. The flax societies sought to purchase better quality seed than was available from local dealers, arranged for scutching (some societies built their own scutching mills), and undertook sale of the produce. Against a background of increasing imports of foreign flax and yarn, and a depressed linen industry, this type of co-operation never made much headway, and was represented by less than a dozen societies in 1914.¹²⁴

A more successful experiment was the extension of co-operative

methods into meat processing. Roscrea co-operative Bacon Factory was formed in 1905, and this was followed a few years later by the establishment of the Wexford Meat Society Ltd.¹²⁵ The combined turnover of these societies was £175,000 in 1914, and they embraced 6,000 members.¹²⁶

Leaving aside a heterogenous grouping of societies such as beekeeping and home industry types,¹²⁷ only one further species merits particular attention. This is the co-operative society that serviced other co-operative societies - the trading federation. As early as 1893 a number of co-operative creameries had banded together as the Irish Co-operative Agency Society Ltd. to market their butter collectively.¹²⁸ Bad debts and a lawsuit, resulting in low prices to the parent societies, almost aborted the embryonic development.¹²⁹ The fledgling society persevered, however, increasing its turnover from £46,000 in 1893 to £65,000 in 1894.¹³⁰ Its existence though was a struggling one; co-operative creameries were happy to spoil it with supplies when other outlets were clogged up, or when they wished to dispose of poor quality produce. Despite the exhortations of the I.A.O.S. for greater discipline in the marketing of butter, a common front among the various co-operative creameries or a successful national marketing strategy did not materialise.¹³¹

In 1915 the turnover of the I.C.A.S. was a respectable £177,500. It should be remembered though that this represented only about 5% of total butter sales from the co-operative creamery sector.¹³²

Table 8. Progress of the Irish Co-operative Agency Society Ltd.

Year	Turnover
1893	£45,600
1898	£133,000
1903	£186,100
1908	£160,600
1913	£163,800
1915	£177,500

It had been originally intended that the I.C.A.S. should also deal in manures, feeding stuffs, seeds, and various creamery requirements, but in 1897 it was decided to constitute a separate co-operative federation to handle these goods.¹³³ This was the Irish Co-operative Agricultural Agency, renamed the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society in the following year. In 1899 it had a membership of 47 shareholders (made up of individuals, dairy and agricultural societies), a paid up share capital of £1,866 and a turnover of £30,000.¹³⁴ Its net profit in that year is given as zero. Through the years the I.A.W.S. gathered strength, and played a useful role in servicing dairy and agricultural societies.

Table 9. Progress of the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society Ltd.

Year	Turnover
1897	£14,500
1900	£38,000
1905	£54,000
1910	£123,500
1915	£375,000

THE POSITION OF THE MOVEMENT IN 1914

A Statistical outline of the agricultural co-operative movement - its development over time and its position in 1914 - is conveyed in tables 10 and 11. It is clear that in terms of numbers, membership, and turnover, the creameries represent by far the most important component. They were also to be the most durable element in the movement; maintaining their members through the war years and beyond, they then expanded their share of the dairy processing business.¹³⁵

The number of credit societies in 1914 is somewhat misleading in that some of these were inactive. Inactive societies tended to slide

into oblivion during the Great War. The total number of credit societies fell dramatically to a level of 124 in 1920 (and indeed this number fell even more drastically in the following decade).¹³⁶ By contrast, over the same period the number of agricultural societies showed a strong upward tendency. This growth was induced by the boom conditions of the war years, but when the post-war slump took effect in 1921 the weaker agricultural societies began to topple rapidly. In less than a decade two-thirds of the societies had been erased from the co-operative map, the number of societies in 1929 being just over a hundred, or slightly less than the total for 1902.¹³⁷ The fall in turnover between 1920 and 1929 was less drastic but nevertheless substantial.

The outbreak of the Great War represents a convenient cut-off point for our study of the early history of the co-operative movement. The inflationary war-time situation changed greatly the economic environment: some forms of co-operation enjoyed a luxuriant, if artificial growth, while others withered away. Social conflicts focusing on the co-operative began to pass largely into folk-memory. Indeed, in terms of the symbolic order of nationalist Ireland, the burning of creameries by the British armed forces removed any lingering ambiguity attaching to these institutions. On another level the period prior to 1914 is of particular importance to this study. As previously explained, this work has a dual focus. Foreground developments, the patterns of co-operative growth, illuminate the crinkled backcloth of rural economy and society. It is the early decades of co-operative propagation that offer the clearest insights into Irish rural society. Once the cutting edge of the movement had become blunted, once the new system was routinised, the utility of this approach is greatly diminished. Having circled high over the co-operative movement and discerned its outline features, it is now necessary to descend in gradually expanding circles to take note of the finer detail of subject and setting.

Table 10. Summary of agricultural co-operative development 1889-1914.

Year	Number of societies	Total turnover £
1889	1	4,363
1890	1	8,500
1891	17	50,382
1892	25	98,969
1893	30	140,780
1894	33	151,852
1895	76	184,947
1896	104	435,905
1897	148*	398,953
1898	243	675,423
1899	424	910,387
1900	477	1,038,877
1901	564	1,182,580
1902	706	1,242,547
1903	840	1,391,047
1904	778	1,532,320
1905	835*	1,477,538
1906	873*	1,814,449
1907	913*	2,017,623
1908	881	2,252,380
1909	835	2,394,469
1910	880	2,589,559
1911	934	2,666,483
1912	947	3,205,189
1913	985	3,333,189
1914	1,023	3,668,958

*Figures for Irish Co-operative Agency Society Ltd. not
available in these years.

TABLE 11
SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FORMS OF
CO-OPERATION IN 1914

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number of Societies</u>	<u>Membership</u>
Creamery	350	47,086
Agricultural	222	21,155
Credit	233	20,340

APPENDIX

The number of creameries and their ownership form in 1905

Counties	Total Number of Creameries	Ownership Form	
		Proprietary and Joint Stock	Co-operative Farmers
Antrim	19	11	8
Armagh	14	5	9
Carlow	-	-	-
Cavan	40	34	6
Clare	13	12	1
Cork	125	104	21
Donegal	17	3	14
Down	2	1	1
Dublin	-	-	-
Fermanagh	26	14	12
Galway	-	-	-
Kerry	74	65	9
Kildare	-	-	-
Kilkenny	31	20	11
Laois	2	1	1
Leitrim	21	8	13
Limerick	112	83	29
Londonderry	14	3	11
Longford	11	8	3
Louth	-	-	-
Mayo	1	1	-
Meath	-	-	-
Monaghan	31	15	16
Offaly	-	-	-
Roscommon	14	8	6
Sligo	24	13	11
Tipperary	121	89	32
Tyrone	50	19	31
Waterford	22	17	5
Westmeath	-	-	-
Wexford	6	3	3
Wicklow	1	-	1
Total of Ireland	791	537	254

Source: The Agricultural Statistics of Ireland for the year 1905
(B.P.P., 1906, CXXXIII), pp. 837-8.

The detailed breakdown of the ownership structure, as revealed in the appendix table, raises some interesting side-issues in relation to the milk processing sector. It is apparent that in the strongly dairying counties of Limerick, Tipperary, and especially Cork (five private enterprise creameries to every one co-operative, reflecting the very determined opposition co-operators met there) the co-operative creameries represent a subsidiary form of development. The principal factor underlying the high ratio of private enterprise to co-operative creameries in the south is the headstart the former system enjoyed. In Ulster, by contrast, there were few creameries of any kind in 1895.* The co-operative system was just then being introduced to the northerners, co-operatives and private creameries got off to a start around the same time, and co-existed in roughly equal proportions a decade later. For Ireland as a whole in 1905 there are approximately two private enterprise creameries to every one co-operative. Though the future lay with the co-operative (the joint-stock or proprietary creamery is in the 1970s a faint memory in the minds of older countryfolk), it is worth emphasising that the ratio between the two systems in 1905 declined only gradually over the following decade. In other words, within the full period of the present study the farmer owned creamery is not the typical form of enterprise in the milk processing business.

*See table 4 of this chapter.

1. This account of the childhood and early years of Horace Plunkett's life is based largely on Margaret Digby's very fine, if sometimes uncritical biography, Horace Plunkett: An Anglo-American Irishman (Oxford, 1949). Also helpful is the work of Plunkett's cousin by marriage, the Countess of Fingall, entitled Seventy Years Young: Memories of Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall [as] told to Pamela Hinkson (London, 1937).
2. H. Plunkett, 'Co-operative Stores for Ireland', The Nineteenth Century, Sept. 1888, 410-18; Digby, op.cit. pp. 48-9.
3. The private diaries of Horace Plunkett (later Sir Horace) that survive date from 1881. These diaries (referred to hereafter as Plunkett Diaries) are housed at the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, St. Giles, Oxford. A microfilm copy is also available in the National Library of Ireland. The entries during the 1880's record interesting snatches of Plunkett's impressions of the U.S., as well as casting light on his developing framework of interests and ideas.
4. Plunkett, loc. cit. pp. 410-18.
5. See report of the proceedings of a general conference of co-operators on 1 Aug.. 1888 in London, as reported in The Co-operative News, 11 Aug. 1888. It noted: "The conference which took place last week at the Irish Exhibition did something more than call attention to the need of co-operation which is felt in Ireland; it marked the opening of a new era in the missionary work..."
6. Plunkett Diaries, 5 Nov. 1888.
7. Plunkett Diaries, 30 Nov., 14 Dec., 1888.
8. Digby, op.cit. p. 52.
9. Plunkett, quoted in the British producer co-operative paper Labour Co-Partnership, Dec. 1898, p. 187.
10. Digby, op.cit., p. 50; Plunkett Diaries, entries during 1889.

11. See Plunkett Diaries, 27 & 28 May 1889.
12. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), p. 8.
13. Plunkett Diaries, 18 July 1889.
14. We are fortunate in that Anderson chose to leave us a lengthy autobiographical sketch, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland. There are, of course, numerous other sources on Irish co-operation which deal more or less extensively with Anderson's life work.
15. Anderson, op.cit. p. 10.
16. W.L. Stokes, 'Irish Creameries', Co-operative Wholesale Society Annual, (Manchester) 1897, 419-449.
17. H. Plunkett, 'Co-operation in Ireland: The Best Means of Promoting Both Distributive & Productive Co-operation in the Rural Districts of Ireland', a paper read to the Co-operative Congress at Glasgow in May 1890 and later published by the Co-operative Union (Manchester, 1890).
18. T. Barrington, 'A Review of Irish Agricultural Prices', Journal of the Statistical & Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, XV, 1926-7, 252-3.
19. J.S. Donnelly, 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Irish Butter Trade', Studia Hibernica, XI, 1971, 132; C. Ó. Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System', Economic History Review, 2nd ser. XXX, 1977, 285. (Butter quantities in the latter, on page 285, should be denominated in cwts.)
20. Stokes, loc. cit. p. 422.
21. Report of the Royal Commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881, and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885 (BPP, 1887, XXVI), Q. 27, 511; Stokes, loc. cit. pp. 420-1; Ó Gráda, loc. cit. p. 287.

22. J. O'Donovan, The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland (Cork, 1940), pp. 304-5; Plunkett, 'Co-operation in Ireland', op.cit. pp. 7-8. Note also the comments of a butter buyer for Home & Colonial Stores Ltd., Report of the Departmental Committee on Butter Regulations: Minutes of Evidence (BPP, 1902, XX) QQ. 1500, 1509.
23. George W. Russell (A.E.), Co-operation & Nationality (Dublin, 1912), p. 16. There is no shortage of gruesome detail on butter making practices; for the reactions of one particularly shocked expert see James Long, 'Our Trade in Dairy Produce', The Co-operative Wholesale Societies Ltd. (England & Scotland): Annual 1892 (Manchester, 1892), 369.
24. Donnelly, loc. cit. p. 160.
25. Plunkett, 'Co-operation in Ireland', loc.cit. pp. 8-9.
26. Stokes, loc.cit. pp. 422-3; O'Donovan, op.cit. p. 320.
27. Stokes, op.cit. p. 423; O'Donovan, op.cit. p. 320. See also Report of the Royal Commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881, QQ. 471, 15,812.
28. Stokes, op.cit. p. 423.
29. Donnelly, loc.cit. pp. 160-1; Plunkett, 'Co-operation in Ireland', loc. cit. p. 9; L. Smith-Gordon & L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London, 1917), p. 42.
30. Plunkett Diaries 28 April 1890; Plunkett, 'Co-operation in Ireland', loc. cit. pp. 7-11.
31. Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, Annual Report 1895 (Dublin, 1895), p. 13. The 30 co-operative creameries had a combined milk intake of slightly over 9 million gallons and a butter output of 3,568,000 lbs. Using the creamery system 2.5 gallons of milk were required on average to make 1 lb. of butter (appendix C). According to Anderson (appendix H of the same report), the old system of butter making required an average of 3 gallons of milk to give 1 lb. of

butter. The new system represented a clear gain in technical efficiency (though not necessarily in economic efficiency in all dairying districts).

32. Plunkett, 'Co-operative Stores for Ireland', loc. cit. p. 416; see also Plunkett Diaries 16 Jan. 1891, and the 9, 19, and 28 March 1894.
33. Plunkett, 'The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, Limited - what it is and what it does', I.A.O.S. Annual Report 1895, p. 17. This paper contains a useful summary of the objectives and proposed strategy of the I.A.O.S.
34. Anderson, op.cit. p. 65.
35. Ibid., p. 67.
36. Ibid., pp. 67-8.
37. See Plunkett Diaries, 1 Febr. 1892; also Anderson, op.cit. pp. 68-70, 74 for a brief pen picture of Fr. Finlay.
38. See address by Plunkett to the first general conference of the Irish Co-operative Dairy and Agricultural Societies, Sept. 1895 as reproduced in the I.A.O.S. annual report of 1896, pp. 23-4; also Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, p. 211.
39. The letter is dated the 27 Aug. 1895. The initial reaction of the Dublin papers was favourable, though by Oct. of that year two papers far removed politically, the Irish Times and the Irish Independent, were voicing disquiet. One of the earliest papers to pour scorn on the idea was the Irish Catholic. "To deal seriously with Mr. Plunkett's Arcadian proposals would be absurd were it not for the fact that we discern in their promulgation at all fresh evidence of the need of stern and vigorous reiteration of Irish National claims" - Irish Catholic, 31 Aug. 1895.
40. While some of the earlier writings on Plunkett's career introduce an unduly heroic dimension, more recently a narrowly critical reaction appears to be setting in. See, for example, F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland

Since the Famine (revised edition, London, 1973), pp. 207-216; C. Ó Gráda, loc. cit. pp. 284-311.

41. The text of Plunkett's proposal and Justin M'Carthy's reply are contained in the Report of the Recess Committee on a Department of Agriculture & Industries for Ireland (New Edition, Dublin, 1906), appendix.A.
42. Report of the Recess Committee...
43. Digby, op.cit. p. 79.
44. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 81.
45. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 116-8.
46. Ibid. p. 117.
47. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, p. 110.
48. For a different view see D. Hootor, The Department's Story: A History of the Department of Agriculture (Dublin, 1971), p. 54.
49. "Ireland in the New Century is one prolonged libel on the whole Irish people and those who have been working for them..." Freeman's Journal, 5 March 1904.
50. A.E.'s role in this acrimonious affair is ably dealt with by H.C. McFadden in 'George W. Russell (A.E.) and Co-operation in Ireland 1897-1914', (unpublished M.A. thesis, University College, Dublin), pp. 31-3.
51. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 149-50. See also Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall, op.cit. pp. 328-9.
52. Redmond's resignation of his seat on the I.A.O.S. committee is reported in the annual report of that body for 1896 (p. 11). His brother, also an M.P., was then co-opted onto the committee, but neither were ever active members - Anderson op.cit. pp. 85-6.

53. See the protests of the Waterford Pig Dealers' Association against the co-operative system, reported in the Waterford Star, 1 Febr. 1896. The Star accused Redmond of vacillating on the issue.
54. It is interesting to note that another very prominent, if rather deviant nationalist, Michael Davitt, like Dillon entertained an early hostility to Plunkett's work. "In lobby met Michael Davitt and asked him why he was attacking my scheme. He was very bitter about it and evidently felt that I should undermine his influence by setting up useful work against agitation." Plunkett Diaries, 1 May 1894.
55. Freeman's Journal, 18 Oct. 1904. The letter is reproduced in full, with Plunkett's defence of his position, in an epilogue to a cheap edition of Ireland in the New Century, published in 1905.
56. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1906, p. 6.
57. Ibid., p. 6.
58. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 135; I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895, p.4.
59. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 135. A very good description of the origins, constitution and progress of the credit societies is contained in the I.A.O.S's Annual Report 1910, pp. 76-81.
60. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1897, p. 27.
61. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1898, p. 13.
62. Ibid., p. 13.
63. Ibid., p. 13.
64. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1899, p. 9.
65. Ibid., p. 23.
66. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1906, p. 6.
67. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1898, p. 57.

68. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 80.
69. Committee of Inquiry into the provisions of the Agricultural & Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, 1899 (Minority Report) (B.P.P., 1907, XV11, p. 1030; I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1902, p. 10.
70. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 81.
71. I.A.O.S. Annual Report 1902, pp. 8, 10. The combined turnover of the societies was £1.17 millions in 1902.
72. Ibid., p. 11.
73. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 81; I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1905, p. 13.
74. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895, p. 5.
75. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 82.
76. Ibid., p. 82. The committee of the I.A.O.S., though having little option in the matter, was clearly apprehensive regarding its increasing financial dependence on DATI, and warned co-operators that it was "now mainly dependent upon the Department of Agriculture for its income". IAOS, Annual Report 1906, p. 16.
77. Committee of Inquiry into the provisions of the Agricultural & Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, 1899, pp. 1031-2.
78. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 77-8.
79. D.A.T.I. (Ireland): Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry (B.P.P., 1907, XV11), p. 818; D.A.T.I., Journal, VII, pp. 215-6; Irish Homestead, 8 Sept. 1906; I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1906, appendix G.
80. Lyons, op.cit. p. 215; Digby op.cit. pp. 113-5.

81. Digby, op.cit. pp. 114-5; Plunkett Diaries, April 1907.
82. For some concise descriptions of T.W. Russell, see, inter alia, F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, p. 215, Digby, op.cit. p. 145, Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. pp. 84, 201, Hector, op.cit. pp. 55-6, W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925), p. 96.
83. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1907, p. 55; Irish Homestead, 30 Nov. 1907.
84. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1907, p. 55.
85. Calculated from (I.A.O.S.) Annual Report 1915.
86. Quoted in the Derry Recorder, 23 Nov. 1895. By about 1915 the IAOS were recommending a guaranteed supply from 800-1200 cows within a radius of 5 or 6 miles - Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 97.
87. These and related issues are superbly, if briefly discussed in Ó Gráda, loc. cit. On the adoption of alternative innovations to the creamery, such as the hand separator see also O'Donovan, op.cit. p. 327.
88. File for the year 1899 of the Kilmactranny Society, held at Plunkett House, Dublin.
89. I.A.O.S., Home Rule in the Dairy (leaflet no. 3B, Dublin, 1899). Note also, I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1906, p. 74.
90. Committee of Inquiry into the provisions of the Agricultural & Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act 1899, pp. 1038-9.
91. This did not result solely from competitive moves between co-operative and private enterprise creameries; different co-operative creameries frequently competed strongly with each other, this being sometimes intensified by local rivalries. See Anderson, op.cit. p. 204 and I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1904, p. 16.
92. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1896, p. 10; Co-operative Union, Annual Congress Report 1895, pp. 139-143.

93. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 77-8. See also Plunkett Diaries 13 March and the 11 Dec. 1891, for indications of growing tensions between Irish and British co-operative leaders.
94. Co-operative Union, Annual Congress Report 1895, p. 139.
95. Ibid. pp. 140-3; IAOS, Annual Report 1896, p. 10; Anderson, op.cit. p. 78; Digby, op.cit. p. 101.
96. The C.W.S. perspective on the Castlemahon affair is put in W.L. Stokes, loc. cit. pp. 443-4. The reaction of Irish co-operators is vigorously expressed in Anderson, op.cit., pp. 76-7.
97. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1898, p. 11. According to the same report, the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society had begun to follow the lead given by its English counterpart. The Scottish trading body had started a creamery at Enniskillen with the intention of adding on four auxiliary creameries.
By 1902 the English CWS had 41 main creameries and 52 auxiliary creameries in the south of Ireland - P. Redfern, The Story of the C.W.S. (London, 1913) p. 301.
98. Stokes, loc. cit. p. 445.
99. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 79-82; Smith-Gordon & Staples pp. 206-8.
100. IAOS, Annual Report 1909, p. 19. In fact, many of the CWS creameries were sold to private companies, see O'Donovan, op.cit. p. 324.
101. Anderson, quoted in the Co-operative News, 19 Dec. 1908, suggested a loss in the region of £120,000. Note also Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. pp. 206-8.
102. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending (B.P.P., 1898 [260] X), Q. 1997.
103. Ibid., Q. 1998. Note also IAOS, Annual Report 1898, p. 13.
104. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1904, p. 156.
105. These relationships with other bodies are discussed extensively in the annual reports of the I.A.O.S. Note also Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.

cit. p. 144, Anderson, op.cit. p. 256, The Horace Plunkett Foundation, Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland: A Survey (London, 1931).

106. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1907, p. 8.

107. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1910, p. 6.

108. See the comments of Micks who was present at the meeting. Micks, op.cit. p. 96; also IAOS, Annual Report 1910, p. 81.

109. Micks, p. 96.

110. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1910, p. 81;

111. This correspondence between the IAOS and T.W. Russell is made public in the Irish Times, 4 June 1910 and in the Irish Homestead, 11 June 1910. In the accompanying editorial comment in the Irish Times, the vice-president was held chiefly responsible for the strained relationships between DATI and the IAOS.

112. Irish Times, 6 June 1910. In a letter in the same paper on the following day Anderson claims that, since the inception of credit societies, up to £250,000 had been loaned (this is presumably the cumulative total for all loans issued) and that no losses had been sustained.

113. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (B.P.P., 1914, XIII).

114. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1910, pp. 79, 81; letter from Anderson in the Irish Times, 7 June 1910.

115. Micks, op.cit. p. 95.

116. The form and aims of these societies is described in detail in A.R. Bourne, Co-operative Agricultural Societies (I.A.O.S. leaflet no. 2), (Dublin, 1895).

116. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895, appendix B.

117. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit., p.123. The episode is vividly recorded in Anderson, op.cit. pp. 88-91, and in the issues of the Irish Homestead for March and April 1895.
118. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1897, pp. 6-7; Smith-Gordon, op.cit. p. 124; Anderson, op.cit. p. 91.
119. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1897, p. 10.
120. A particularly sharp review of the deficiencies of the agricultural societies is contained in the I.A.O.S.'s Annual Report 1909, pp. 10-11. Here they are described as in some respects the least satisfactory of the forms of co-operation introduced by the I.A.O.S.
121. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. pp. 155-6. According to the I.A.O.S.'s Annual Report 1899 (p. 24), Liverpool & Glasgow egg merchants threatened to cease buying Irish eggs altogether unless improvements as regards freshness and cleanliness were forthcoming.
122. Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. p. 158.
123. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1902, pp. 26-28.
124. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1915, p. 140.
125. An interesting, if brief account of the origins of the Rocrea Bacon Factory and the early difficulties encountered is given in the I.A.O.S.'s Annual Report 1910, pp. 66-7.
126. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1915.
127. These are described in some detail in Smith-Gordon & Staples, op.cit. chapters X and XI.
128. Trade Federation: The Irish Co-operative Agency Society (IAOS Leaflet no. 60, Dublin, 1902); Anderson op.cit. p. 204; O'Donovan, op.cit. p. 323.
129. Anderson, pp. 205-7.
130. IAOS, Annual Report 1895, p. 3.

131. IAOS, Annual Report 1909, p. 25; Anderson, op.cit. pp. 214-5; Horace Plunkett Foundation, pp. 329-30.
132. Calculated from IAOS statistics - Annual Report 1916, pp. 139,157.
133. Trade Federation: The Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society (IAOS Leaflet no. 59, Dublin, 1902); Horace Plunkett Foundation, op.cit. p. 328; I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1897, p. 9.
134. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1899, statistical appendix, p. 18.
135. The output of co-operative creameries in 1929 was 88% of the output of creamery butter in the Irish Free State. The Horace Plunkett Foundation, op.cit. p. 302. For a view of the development of the co-operative creamery system from later vantage points in time, see J.K. Knapp, An Appraisement of Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland (Dublin, 1964) and J. Parkinson, Agricultural Co-operation in Northern Ireland: A Report on the place of co-operation in the future development of Northern Ireland Agriculture (Belfast, 1965).
136. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1921; Horace Plunkett Foundation, op.cit. p. 380.
137. The Horace Plunkett Foundation, p. 354.

CHAPTER 2

ADOPTION OF CO-OPERATIVE ORGANISATION: THE EARLY YEARS

In this chapter co-operative organisation is treated as a form of agricultural innovation. Our aim is to effect a rough reconstruction of the adoption process which is necessarily associated with the diffusion of co-operative organisation through the countryside in the early 1890's. To this end a decision-making model of the kind that has found a wide currency in the field of agricultural innovation has been used. The particular form used is that described by Jones in 1972 (reproduced in slightly modified form in Figure I here).¹ This was chosen because it represents a sophisticated elaboration of mainstream research into the adoption process.

Technical Change in Agriculture

A simple model of technical change identifies three conceptually distinct systems: (a) a knowledge-creating system generating a stream of innovations over time, (b) a system for diffusing such innovations plus information about them, (c) a client system i.e. in the present instance, the farmers and labourers to whom these innovations potentially refer. Normally it is more realistic to conceive of these as three interacting systems with feed-back linkages between each. We only briefly discuss the first two systems here as these have been treated, albeit less explicitly, in the previous chapter. Most attention is concentrated on the third system, using the Jones' model as our major analytical device.

In the Irish case knowledge of the innovative item - the co-operative form of organisation - derived from the historical experience of consumer co-operation in Britain, and more immediately from the

British Co-operative Union's developing interest in Ireland in the late 1880s. Coupled to this was the spontaneous interest and limited co-operative experience of some Irishmen, most notably Horace Plunkett. At a slightly later point in time European rural co-operative experience was drawn on by two other co-operative pioneers, Fr. Finlay, S.J. and R.A. Anderson.

Initially the task of diffusing information and technical aid on agricultural co-operatives was undertaken by Plunkett, Anderson, Finlay and a small group of philanthropists. Essentially these constituted the channels whereby foreign experience was transferred and adapted to the Irish context. In the course of propagating co-operative organisation, field experience came to modify, sometimes in fairly drastic form, the initial objectives and strategies of these pioneers. The year 1894 saw the creation of a formal propagandist body, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I.A.O.S.). Its central concern was the promotion and consolidation of co-operative forms of enterprise. It also advocated a number of complementary innovations at national level, most particularly state departments of agriculture and technical education. With the institution of the I.A.O.S. the production and diffusion of information regarding co-operatives was developed along more systematic lines. The I.A.O.S. made itself responsible for the provision of paid instructors, propaganda leaflets, a co-operative newspaper (Irish Homestead), and some further specialised services such as accountancy and engineering expertise. For a brief period after its inception in 1900 the Irish Department of Agricultural and Technical Instruction aided the spread of co-operatives but later assumed an antagonistic posture. A further state developmental agency, the Congested Districts Board, initially played a modest role in promoting less controversial forms of co-operative organisation

such as co-operative credit.² As regards the media, some newspapers were sympathetic to the spread of the co-operative idea, but in the main the press, especially the nationalist press, transmitted hostile comment either in relation to specific forms of co-operation or, less frequently, in relation to the co-operative movement as a whole.³

A swift appraisal of features of the cultural environment is helpful in considering the process and problems of innovation. Many Irish farming communities at the end of the 19th century possessed an essentially peasant character - strong attachment to the family land-holding, work and leisure patterns regulated by seasonal and weather conditions, and a consciousness that stressed the central realities of religion, kinship, and tradition. In so far as tradition was a major determinant of behaviour it is to be expected that forms of social deviancy, such as attempts to adopt complex innovations, were likely to evoke strong negative pressures.⁴ Resistance to innovation was very probably reinforced by the patriarchal structure of the family (especially as reflected in the intra-family exercise of decision-making functions), and also by the reluctance to transfer the family holding to the ageing and necessarily celibate heir. In addition to the unfavourable age structure of the farm population, its sex composition as viewed from an economic standpoint was also deteriorating.⁵ Again, bearing on the human resources engaged in Irish agriculture, the quantity and quality of formal education embodied in the working population compared unfavourably with that of a major competitor such as Denmark.⁶ In some regions, particularly the west of Ireland, many holdings had such poor farming potential as to preclude the possibility of ever attaining a threshold level of economic viability. Confronted with these cultural and structural barriers to innovation it is hardly surprising that co-operative pioneers found it

necessary to convene over fifty meetings before a single society was formed.⁷ In the words of Anderson⁸:

... audiences were composed of suspicious, needy farmers, fooled many times by specious charlatans, depressed by bad times, endless hardships, often rack-rented. And, almost to a man, they were Roman Catholic; they expressed hatred and distrust of England, they hated the landlords much, and the land agents even more.

Attention should also be drawn to some distinctive features of decision-making in relation to the adoption/rejection of co-operative organisation. Firstly, a large number of independent decision-makers were involved. Secondly, while an individual could reject the innovation, he/she could not adopt it unless a minimum number of like-minded individuals had reached similar decisions and were willing to participate in the appropriate group structure. The effective adopting unit for a dairy co-operative in the 1890s was believed to require a pooled cow population of at least 500 cows within a radius of two-and-a-half miles of the proposed creamery centre.⁹ In the distributive sphere, the minimum size of an agricultural society depended crucially on the purchasing power of its members. An I.A.O.S. organiser in an extremely poor area in the north-west of Ireland was moved to claim that at least two hundred members would be required to form an economically viable group.¹⁰ As regards credit co-operatives, a somewhat later development, the average membership size was just over sixty members in 1905.¹¹

Changing Environment

Our introductory discussion gave little reason to suspect strong innovative propensities among Irish farmers. And yet it would appear to be over-gloomy. Certain forms of agricultural co-operation did gain a firm foot-hold in a comparatively short space of time. By March 1895, 56 dairy, one credit, and 10 agricultural co-operative societies

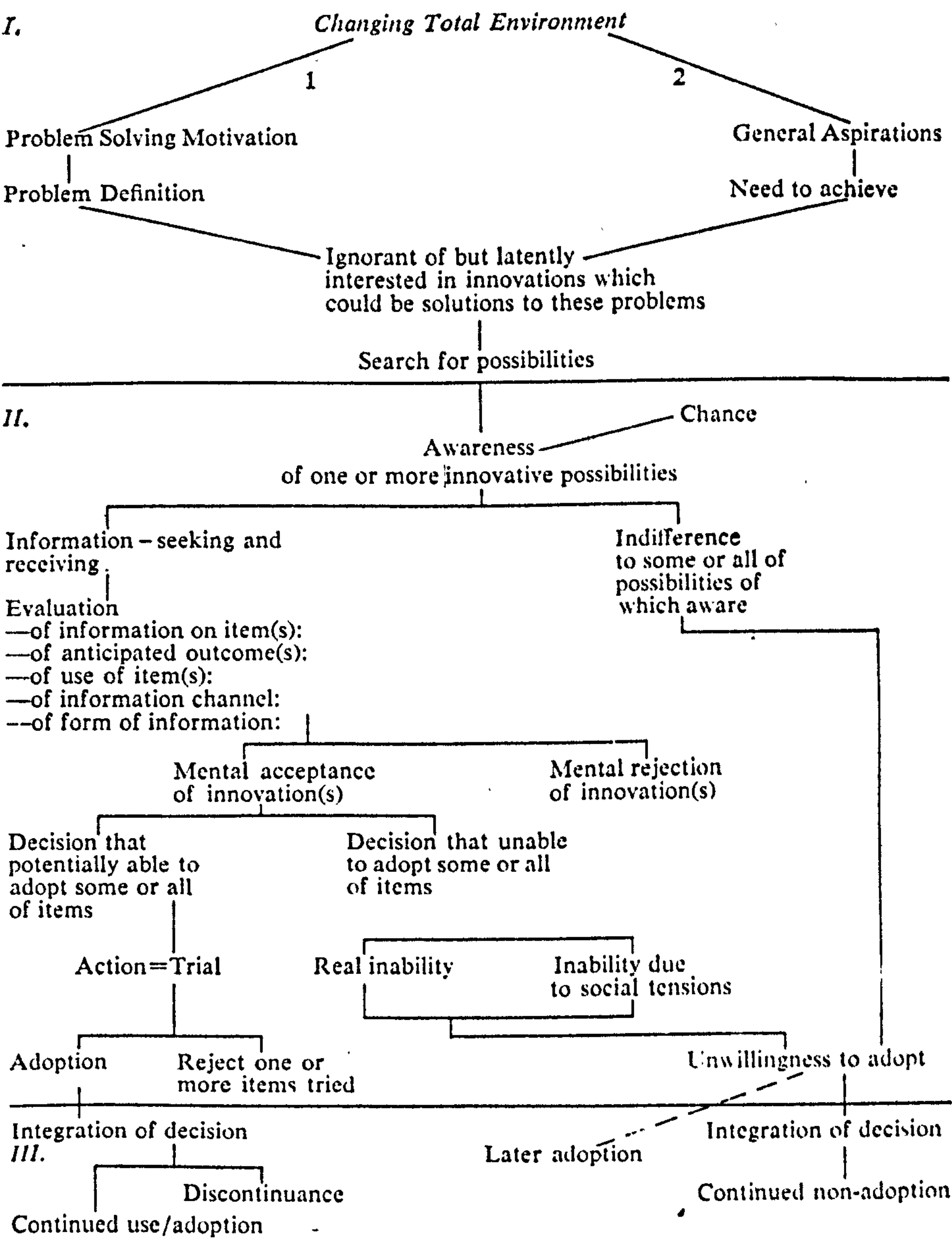
had been formed; on the eve of World War I there existed a total of 1023 societies, about a third of these being dairy societies.¹² Two distinct forms of innovative behaviour are possible here. One is the situation where a farmer anticipates or actively seeks out profitable opportunities or other forms of goal achievement. This requires strong initiative and forward planning. The second type is more reactive in nature. The farmer responds to adverse changes in his environment, e.g. downward pressure on his accustomed or expected standard of living forces him to adjust established production and/or marketing arrangements. The latter would seem to describe the motivational source for most Irish farmers' adoption of co-operative organisation.

Irish farm produce prices were depressed under the impact of the international depression in agriculture from the mid 1870s onwards. In the key dairying industry butter prices fell heavily between 1875 and 1900.¹³ Even more serious, by the early 1890s more uniform creamery produce, from Denmark in particular, tended to depress further the price of home produced Irish butter on its traditional British market. Other strains in the rural economy stemmed from unsatisfactory credit arrangements for small farmers and labourers, and in some instances defects in the marketing and retailing structure. Thus in this particular instance adoption of co-operative organisation appears to have sprung less from a sharp entrepreneurial response than from forced adjustment to a changing economic environment.

Having specified the changing environment and the major motivational force for innovation, it is now possible to proceed with a more detailed application of the model. The model is set out in a somewhat modified form in Figure I. Thus, for the sake of brevity, stage one is presented in a more compressed form without, it is believed, taking from the analytical apparatus or its capacity to embrace the particular

historical sequences under study.

Figure 1 A model of innovation decision making



Problem definition might seem a comparatively easy step. However, in the present case, identifying relevant causal variables was complicated by the constitutional link between Ireland and Britain, the strength of nationalist passions, and the unsatisfactory state of landlord-tenant relationships. It is best therefore to conceive of stages one and two as partly overlapping. In the process of diffusing information about co-operatives, the pioneer co-operators sought

to define the basic source of agricultural depression in terms of the vastly enhanced productivity of some European and American agricultures and the development of an international food market which tended to integrate these rural economies.¹⁴ Rent levels, which in any case were coming to be regulated by judicial rather than market forces, were given little emphasis in the co-operators' explanatory framework. By contrast the major nationalist organ, the Freeman's Journal, was not unrepresentative of public opinion when it exclaimed "The most real and substantial remedy for agricultural distress is substantial reduction of the exorbitant rents".¹⁵ In general it may be stated that co-operators deviated from much conventional wisdom in emphasising economic as distinct from quasi-political interpretations of social distress.

Already in strong dairying areas small groups of farmers were groping towards an effective response to some of their problems. Thus, one notes in Plunkett's diaries during the first two years of his co-operative crusade that joint-stock creameries owned by some leading farmers were being seriously considered.¹⁶ However, such instances were quite isolated; in the absence of strong co-operative propaganda from outside the farming population, a farmer response either along co-operative or private enterprise lines would not have proceeded very far. As a further indicator of the weakness of an autonomous farmer response to their difficulties one notes that, in areas where private creameries had entered the market, farmers were quite reluctant to develop their own producers' organisations. Plunkett exclaimed: "Not a meeting did we hold to start a creamery society at which there was not manifested a strong preference for having the work done for them by someone else. They offered to enter into engagements with us for the supply of all their milk upon the most reasonable terms if

only we would risk the capital and undertake the management".¹⁷ Effectively the range of innovative possibilities specifically geared to dairy farmers reduced to the following: formation of a co-operative creamery, supplying to a privately owned creamery where available, and in some areas supplying to a creamery branch of the English or Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies. Overall, in relation to dairy and other forms of co-operation, it can be said that precise problem definition and awareness of innovative possibilities were interacting processes, one serving to clarify the other.

In the early 1890s one can really only speak of information receiving on the part of farmers. A small band of philanthropists, concentrating their efforts mainly in the southern counties, sought to induce farmers to form co-operative agricultural and dairy societies - credit and industrial societies being later proposals. Initially developments were slow; meetings were often poorly attended; politically or economically motivated opposition compounded the problems of suspicion and apathy. At Rathkeale, in the rich dairying county of Limerick, the plain dairy cow was put in the shade by a far more sacred beast: "Rathkeale is a Nationalist town - Nationalist to the backbone - and every pound of butter made in this creamery must be made upon Nationalist principles or it shan't be made at all."¹⁸ Anderson recalls another disappointing meeting in the same county.¹⁹

... a meeting was arranged at the school-house. We arrived punctually, in torrents of pitiless rain. We were met by the schoolmaster and the R.I.C. sergeant. It was in holiday time and the school was cold, mouldy, damp and horribly smelly. Turf was produced, but it was so wet that it would only smoulder and produce suffocating clouds of smoke from which we were glad to escape to the lee-side of the building. One by one, half a dozen or more drenched farmers rolled in... Nothing resulted from this meeting, nor from scores of such meetings.

A small turning point was reached in 1892. With obvious satisfaction Plunkett records in his dairy (end of August of that year) of being

approached by a deputation of farmers who came to seek his aid in starting a creamery although, as he notes, they had not "taken advantage of my offered help two years ago". By 1895 the demand for co-operative information had severely strained the capacity of the I.A.O.S. to supply such. In consequence there was a shift of emphasis to consolidating existing co-operatives rather than opening up new areas.

Farmers' Evaluation of the Co-operative Idea

As already indicated, in the early phase of co-operative propagation farmers tended to be fairly sceptical of information flows emanating from co-operative enthusiasts. Their estimation of the economic benefits that might accrue to them through co-operative organisation was similarly in line with this negative appraisal. It must also be remembered that the initial emphasis was on co-operative stores rather than dairy co-operatives and farmers either then or later were less easily convinced of the suitability of such an innovation and/or their ability to adopt it. Indeed this component of co-operation never secured more than a slow and uneven progress by comparison with dairy co-operatives. However, co-operative pioneers were quick to note the lines of less resistance and switched the emphasis accordingly.

The form in which information might be conveyed to farmers presented some problems. The most important means of spreading preliminary information about co-operation was through the medium of public meetings, frequently held in the open air outside church gates. Plunkett was a poor public speaker, a severe handicap in a country noted for rousing speech-making. In order to make the co-operative message more attractive, Plunkett acquired the paid services of a nationalist member of parliament with developed demagogic qualities.

For a brief period co-operative meetings might be opened to the strains of a nationalist brass band but this ended with the untimely death of the M.P. in September 1890, less than a month after joining the campaign.²⁰ Henceforth, less revivalist type techniques were employed. Anderson developed as a competent public speaker, increasingly sensitive to the moods of his audiences. Not only that, it appears he sometimes played an important role in bridging the communication gap that could open up between Plunkett and his listeners. Anderson recalls, for example, that in the early days of co-operation two meetings in succession were destroyed by the unfortunate choice of a metaphor by Plunkett.²¹ On Anderson's advice the offending reference was dropped, thus removing at least one self-created communication barrier. These episodes, though, serve to illustrate the delicate nature of the task sometimes facing co-operative speakers.

It may be helpful at this point to reproduce an abbreviated account of a meeting to organise a co-operative society. This serves two purposes: (a) it typifies the kind of arguments advanced by co-operative promoters and (b) it gives an indication of the issues presumed important in terms of farmers' perception of the situation. If one goes further and accepts that co-operative propagandists were reasonably sensitive to the problems and preoccupations of their farmer-listeners and that they shaped their arguments accordingly, then one may be also given a rough and admittedly indirect impression of some of the dominant issues coursing through the average farmer's mind. The meeting selected is one at Ballyrashane in 1896 where about 250 farmers and other interested persons attended to discuss the possibility of forming a co-operative creamery society. The report of the proceedings is taken from a local newspaper.²²

The Chairman opened the meeting with some well-chosen remarks on the subject of foreign competition and suggested that the Danes should be defeated in the butter trade as our ancestors

had beaten them in other respects in days of yore. He explained that to do this it was necessary to adopt their methods of manufacture...

Mr. Bourne, of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, next addressed the meeting at length, giving a detailed description of the formation and working of a co-operative dairy society... Every person in the district who had cows should be a shareholder in the society. The shares, he explained, were £1 each, and each farmer took shares according to the number of cows he owned; thus a farmer with five cows took five shares, and a farmer with ten cows took ten shares. That perhaps might frighten a farmer who, though he had ten cows, was not able in these times of agricultural depression to put his hand in his pocket and produce a £10 note; but this was not necessary. All the farmer was obliged to do was to pay one fourth - five shillings - on each of his shares on allotment. Another call would be made by a committee elected by the shareholders in about three months' time. In most of the dairying societies, two calls were all that had been made on the share capital. Mr. Bourne went on further to explain the working of the society.

Subsequently he was most intelligently 'heckled' on various subjects relating to dairying by several of those present.

The Ballyrashane meeting is fairly representative of the business-like meeting where political or other vested interests did not intrude on the discussions. However, as we have previously noted, in other areas and at other public meetings extra-economic factors might cloud farmers' reactions. Thus for more than the first two decades of co-operative development considerable doubt attached to the credibility of the main information channels. Plunkett, of course, was of the ascendancy class, and in politics a unionist. His chief field activist was a former land agent - a distinctly unpopular occupation during a period of strained landlord and tenant relations. Both were Protestants, always an important consideration in Catholic Ireland. Even a casual reading of news-reports of meetings called to organise co-operative societies shows the extreme sensitivity of these issues. Consideration of co-operators' credentials and the identifying characteristics of those who had associated themselves with their work were

matters of intense concern. Thus, one finds advocates of co-operation repeatedly assuring listeners that the I.A.O.S. and the co-operative movement were non-political and non-sectarian - this being in itself something of an innovation! Sometimes the assurance was in a form at once explicit and also quite revealing of what non-political and non-sectarian meant in an Irish context. Thus, Plunkett describes the composition of the I.A.O.S. at a public meeting as follows: "The society consists of men, and I might say leading men of all shades of politics. There are six Unionists and six Nationalists in the society".²³ On another occasion Anderson, under some pressure to defend the membership of the I.A.O.S., cites the presence of a prominent Roman Catholic Bishop and some nationalist M.P.s in that body. However, as he wryly comments in his autobiography, while most of these rarely attended meetings of the I.A.O.S., nonetheless "we had to get names 'to conjure with'".²⁴ Indeed well into the present century the I.A.O.S. under increasing political attack had to request individual co-operative societies to prepare submissions testifying to its non-political and non-sectarian character.²⁵ One assumes such attacks on the credibility of co-operators and on the economic soundness of co-operative enterprise produced an inhibiting effect on the rate and direction of co-operative development. However, such distrust was probably less keenly felt within interested farming areas once initial resistance had been overcome. In relation to dairy co-operatives at any rate Plunkett's assessment of reaction to his efforts seems plausible: "They respect me, if they don't like my politics".²⁶

With additional practical experience, more finance, and a permanent organisation from 1894 onwards, co-operators were better placed to provide a more comprehensive flow of information, as well as more specific aids on particular problems. The development of specialised services relating to building design, accountancy, quality control, and

the marketing and buying of certain agricultural inputs and outputs at wholesale level also tended to reduce the uncertainty surrounding adoption of co-operative organisation - this in turn tending to increase the expected net benefit to the farmer from adopting the innovation. It is also quite probable that an increasingly negative assessment of the alternatives available further boosted farmers' estimation of the expected net benefits stream. Co-operators were not slow to exploit this point.²⁷ Plunkett warned of the dangers of monopsonistic practices in dairying areas if control of milk processing passed into the hands of private enterprise.²⁸ The Irish Homestead frequently alleged that the rural marketing structure supported too many unproductive middlemen, while local moneylenders were commonly the subject of attack. Needless to say, once the co-operative experiment had proved successful in some areas, farmers had a firmer base from which to judge anticipated outcomes in their own particular situations. Thus, the first annual report of the I.A.O.S. contained detailed reports on the prices paid to farmers by dairy co-operatives as well as a statement of co-operative retail prices for artificial manures. This propaganda material was radiated by the Irish Homestead, some local newspapers, and by co-operative instructors.

Later Stages of the Adoption/Rejection Process

When farmers had proceeded to that point in the decision-making process where they had mentally accepted as a good idea one or more of the proposed co-operative innovations it was still possible for some to conclude that they were unable to move forward to the adoption stage. This could be due to real inability or inability to adopt arising out of social tensions. In the former category one might place such factors as insufficient capital resources, considerable

variation about the expected outcome level (making an innovation unsuitable for subsistence-type farmers for instance), personal, physical and psychological barriers to the effective adoption and integration of an innovation. In the present case most of these could only be weakly limiting factors; the capital burden imposed on co-operative shareholders was relatively light; risk-bearing was unequally distributed; the benefits of group trading were frequently extended to non-shareholders. Furthermore, a co-operative society did not necessarily require a high level of business skills and the active participation of more than a limited core of its total membership. The more significant instances of such inability stemmed from the unsuitability of an innovation for particular categories of farmers (e.g., creameries were unsuited to areas with a low milk density, while credit societies by virtue of their unlimited liability rule were not well adapted to farming communities with a highly unequal income distribution). Inability to adopt also arose at the individual level due to the logical necessity of involving other farmers in group schemes.

The efforts of co-operators or aspiring co-operators were also constrained by the socio-political realities of rural Ireland. Important non-farming groups in rural society - traders, politicians, sometimes Roman Catholic clergy - sought to emasculate the competitive thrust of co-operative enterprise. By raising the level of uncertainty associated with the co-operative innovation, vested interest groups prolonged the decision-making process and in some instances forced the abandonment of group ventures.²⁹ The imposition of sanctions on farmer co-operators was a feature in some areas also.³⁰

Of major relevance to the adoption and diffusion of innovations are their technical characteristics. Farmers' decisions in relation

to co-operative organisation were certainly not facilitated by the fact that this involved totally new concepts of business methods and economic relationships. Associated with these changes went some restructuring of social relationships as well as a new spatial arrangement of economic activity. Unlike some farming innovations which are readily divisible and easily subjected to trial, (fertilisers for instance), no such pilot schemes could be resorted to in the case of co-operatives. A full commitment to the setting-up of a local society had to be made, or the idea abandoned. An indirect form of trial was, however, possible and was powerfully exploited by co-operative propagandists. In the early stages of the movement Irish activists could appeal to the successful experience of European, especially Danish, farmers in implementing co-operative forms of organisation.³¹ Later of course it was possible to use existing Irish societies as models which could be inspected and emulated.³² A founder member of a dairy co-operative society in the west of Ireland, for instance, relates travelling specially to the south of the country to study dairy co-operatives at first hand.³³ Indeed co-operative developments in the northern half of Ireland initially lagged behind developments in the south by several years. Thus, the latter were frequently used as models in convincing farmers of the performance capabilities of the proposed innovations.

To place the extent of the adoption of co-operative organisation in brief historical perspective we recapitulate on the broad quantitative features of co-operative growth. (It should be clear though that our application of the decision making model really only refers to the first six or seven years of co-operative organisation - in many respects the most interesting phase from the viewpoint of innovation). By 1915, despite strenuous opposition, co-operation had spread widely through the Irish farming community. In the western region credit

societies predominated, while in the southern counties, and to a lesser extent in the north-west, dairy co-operatives were firmly established. Some limited success had been achieved in the formation of agricultural supply societies, handicraft societies and some miscellaneous types of enterprise. Over 100,000 farmers had become members of co-operative societies by 1915, and indeed these societies probably serviced an even wider body of farmers, as some were willing to trade with such societies but reluctant to become full members. This is modified, though, to the extent that there was some overlap in membership between different types of co-operative societies. It does not, however, alter the more significant point in the present context that roughly 100,000 innovative decisions were made by farmers (and occasionally labourers). These decisions, of course, reflected varying degrees of activity and passivity, and it could be argued that in many cases a dynamic minority carried along the bulk of farmers.

The above structuring of the historical material is a product of the interaction of theory and empirical data. It might be classified as what is loosely known as applied-history.³⁴ Historical material is cast in a form which readily lends itself to intertemporal comparisons as well as, as in the present instance, representing an addition to the relevant case study literature. In addition, issues regarding the adequacy and generality of social science models are raised. One presumption on the part of the writer when beginning the present study was that on the methodological front there are large areas of potentially fruitful exchange between social science disciplines and history. The following chapter is devoted largely to an exploration of issues of method raised by this particular application of theory to history.

FOOTNOTES

1. G.E. Jones, 'Agricultural Innovation and Farmer Decision Making', in Agriculture (Open University, 1972). In 1967 the same author described a rather similar, though less detailed model - representative of the then current state of research - in his massive survey of the adoption and diffusion of agricultural practices. Jones, 'The Adoption and Diffusion of Agricultural Practices', World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts, vol. IX, No. 3, 1967. The 1972 version is really a refinement of the earlier model, modified in the light of further empirical and theoretical work.
2. W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925).
3. An interesting and valuable exception among nationalist local newspapers is the Nenagh News in the 1890s (later absorbed into the Nenagh Guardian). Its editorial policy was strongly in favour of co-operative ventures and its columns carried especially detailed accounts of public meetings on co-operation.
4. Plunkett in particular emphasised and deplored the sensitivity to social pressures and the prevalence of conformist patterns of behaviour. H. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century (London, 1904), pp. 80-1.
5. R. Crotty, Irish Agricultural Production (Cork, 1966), pp. 104-5; J. Lee, 'Irish Agriculture', Agricultural History Review, Vol. XVII, 1969.
6. Primary education had been compulsory in Denmark since 1814 and by the 1870s ten per cent of the rural youth attended a Folk High School. See F.H. Webster, Agricultural Co-operation in Denmark (Oxford, 1973). Compulsory primary education had not become effective in Ireland until the early 20th century.
7. Plunkett, quoted in the Northern Whig, 20, December 1895.
8. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935) p. 39.
9. Anderson, quoted in the Derry Recorder, 23 Nov. 1895. The average number of members associated with a dairy co-operative in 1894 was just over 50. See I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895 (Dublin 1895).
10. P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (Tralee, n.d.).
11. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1905.
12. Statistics taken from relevant I.A.O.S. annual reports.
13. T. Barrington, 'A Review of Irish Agricultural Prices', Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, Vol. XV, 1926-7, pp. 252-3.
14. Note, for example, Plunkett, op.cit. pp. 179-80; Anderson, quoted in the Coleraine Constitution, 23 Nov. 1895.
15. Freeman's Journal, 9 Oct. 1895.

16. Plunkett Diaries 1889-90, passim.
17. Plunkett quoted in Labour Co-Partnership, Vol. IV, 1898, p. 94. Note also Anderson, op.cit. pp. 245-49 and the comments of W.L. Stokes on the Castlemahon creamery affair in his article 'Irish Creameries' in the Co-operative Wholesale Society Annual (Manchester) 1897, 419-449.
18. Quoted in M. Digby, Horace Plunkett (Oxford, 1949), p. 55.
19. Anderson, op.cit., pp. 34-5, 37.
20. Plunkett Diaries, 9 Sept. 1890 and 20 Sept. 1890.
21. Anderson, op.cit. p. 38.
22. Coleraine Constitution, 14 March 1896.
23. Quoted in Irish Independent, 14 Jan. 1896. Some other meetings where there is defensive comment on the composition of the IAOS may be noted. See, for example, reports in the Nenagh News (30 June, 1894), Northern Whig (22 Oct. 1895), Roscommon Herald (30 Nov. 1895), Nenagh News (25 Jan. 1896), Cork Examiner (10 Febr. 1896).
24. Anderson, op.cit. p. 85.
25. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1911, p. 50.
26. Plunkett Diaries, 17 Oct. 1892. It should be borne in mind that this entry was made after a meeting of co-operative delegates in a region which Plunkett himself had canvassed intensively over a period of about three years. It is interesting, nonetheless, to see that farmers were actively separating out the economic from the political issues.
27. See for instance reports of meetings on co-operation in the following local papers: Tyrone Constitution, 15 Nov. 1895; Belfast News-letter, 22 Nov. '95; Coleraine Constitution, 23 Nov. '95; Roscommon Messenger, 18 Jan. '96; Cork Examiner, 10 Feb. '96.
28. Report in Northern Whig, 20 Dec. '95; Labour Co-Partnership, IV, 1898, 94.
29. Anderson, op.cit., pp. 8, 16-17, 20-24.
30. Gallagher, op.cit., pp. 98-104, 118; L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London, 1917).
31. Instances of the use of Danish or other European co-operatives as models for the Irish situation occur frequently in newsreports of co-operative meetings. See, for example: Drogheda Conservative 12 Oct. '95; Belfast News-Letter 22 Oct. '95 and 22 Nov. '95; Wexford Chronicle 30 Oct. '95; Tyrone Constitution 15 Nov. '95; Coleraine Constitution 23 Nov. '95; Cork Examiner 10 Feb. '96; Roscommon Messenger 28 Dec. '95. The point was frequently made by the Irish Homestead, and also in official publications of the I.A.O.S.

32. The use of existing Irish co-operatives as models for other areas is strongly evident. See: Belfast News-Letter 20 Nov. '95; Tyrone Free Press, end of Nov. '95; Newtownards Chronicle 23 Nov. '95; Northern Whig 20 Dec. '95; Wexford People 22 Jan. '96; Cork Herald 12 Feb. '96. See also official I.A.O.S. publications.
33. J. Gore-Booth at a general meeting of the Drumcliffe Co-op. Dairy Society, quoted in the Sligo Champion, 28 Sept. 1895.
34. For a pursuit of the definitional point see the editor's introduction to M. Drake (ed.), Applied Historical Studies, (London, 1973).

CHAPTER 3

AN EVALUATION OF THE JONES' MODEL

As stated in the previous chapter, a multi-stage model of the adoption process in relation to agricultural innovations is now widely accepted, and indeed has found some application in other research areas.¹ The basic model (of which there are a number of variants) postulates a logically ordered series of psychological states considered crucial in the individual's adaptation to a changing environment. This essentially classificatory device allows the filing of social data in a systematic fashion, while also specifying a particular chronological sequence. One way of assessing the scope and validity of such a model is to test its performance in specific historical situations. What is the sphere of reference of the model? How space and time bound are its implications? And from the point of view of the applied historian, how useful is the model in developing meaningful reconstructions of the past? With these questions in mind we consider in some detail the exercise contained in the previous chapter. Having matched the Jones' model against a particular empirical situation, we are now in a position to form an evaluation of its performance. From within the narrow but exacting framework of our case study, a number of findings emerged which are supplemented by reference to some general methodological considerations and an expanded set of empirical observations.

Interdependencies in decision making

Perhaps the first problem, which must be confronted by any social scientist using a model building approach, centres on the selection of data. Thus while synthetic models may be more or less useful in rendering social action intelligible, in any overall assessment the practitioner

"must be guided by his knowledge of what is left out... as well as what is included..."² Inferences based on the data used in the model should be consistent with inferences drawn from the total data set. Thus in the Irish study it was clear that a number of points on decision making in relation to the formation of co-operative societies needed to be emphasised. The varying responses of different social groups to the spread of agricultural co-operation requires treatment. While interdependencies within farming groups were stressed in the commentary on the model³ the strategic role of non-farming groups in the rural social structure was somewhat obscured. Landlords, land agents, clergymen, and some professionals such as schoolteachers and rural doctors - few of whom had any direct economic interest in co-operative innovation - frequently played a crucial leadership role in the formation of societies. Such prominent local personalities, who are nation-oriented as distinct from community-oriented in the terminology of Wolf, often acted as secondary sources of information, reassurance, and initiative.⁴ In the more backward regions these sometimes constituted the main focal points of change.⁵ In view of the increasing numerical significance of non-farming groups in rural parts of Ireland and Western Europe⁶ this is likely to be a factor of increasing rather than diminishing importance, at least in relation to the adoption of certain forms of innovation in the years ahead.

The forces of reaction are no less important. Where powerfully arrayed, they affected major areas of the individual and group decision making process - awareness of the innovation, interest, information seeking and receiving, evaluation, ability to adopt or not. Intense hostility to the spread of co-operation emanated from rural traders, and to a lesser extent from Nationalist politicians. Thus the negative information flows generated are crucial to an understanding of farmers' evaluative judgments of the co-operative idea, and indeed of the history

of particular co-operative developments. Not infrequently such hostile comment bore only the most tenuous relationship with reality: co-operation might be blamed for "emigrating" the people, poisoning the calves, causing idleness among women, or creating various other strange disorders.⁷ A recent writer has added the further complaint that credit co-operatives increased jealousy in rural communities.⁸ The more substantial criticisms were of a political or economic nature.

It appeared initially that the model failed to accommodate such negative information flows, but on reflection it may be possible to include either (or both) negative and positive information, and certainly in the real world the process of evaluation would normally imply consideration of both. The adequacy of the model in this respect rests critically on what one means by "information". Jones gives one generic definition of information as that which reduces uncertainty. If one adheres strictly to this definition (an unnecessary constraint it could be argued) then the model does not in general embrace negative information. If one uses the term negative information to cover misinformation - because of its practical significance misinformation should enter somewhere - then obviously the effect is normally to increase uncertainty. Even if the information is accurate but unfavourable it may be selective in its treatment of issues, weighting too heavily the costs of innovation, and not infrequently raising the level of uncertainty facing the potential adopter. One may note here that in the case of Irish co-operatives the effect of both misinformation and of hostile but factually based statements was to promote uncertainty regarding the outcome of adoption.⁹

It might be helpful, in view of the foregoing, to build the distinction between positive and negative information (or some such classification) more explicitly into the theoretical structure. It might also be suggested that overt treatment of both kinds of information

would provide further connecting tissue with processes in the social environment which bear, favourably or otherwise, on decision making. Such lateral linkages, in contrast to the largely forward flowing stages of the model, would relate decision making in a complex, but more realistic manner to its social context - essentially, that is, highlighting the specific points of contact between psychological states (in the model) and sociological situations (in the larger social system). Overall it would seem that the model is better adapted to coping with individualistic decision making, notably in capitalistic farming where the economic and other spheres are well separated and complicating cross-currents reduced to a minimum. Given the less differentiated character of Irish rural life, with its numerous interweaving social and economic relationships, systematic analysis is rendered more difficult.

Socio-political dimensions of innovation

Emphasis on negative information flows leads directly into a major issue, the socio-political characteristics of certain innovations. Almost inevitably, the formation of new group organisations to undertake processing, marketing or supply functions induces currents of opposition from existing interests. After all, the central objective of such group innovators is usually either to improve their terms of trade with outsiders, or to entirely displace certain economic interests. The history of agricultural co-operation bears ample testimony to such induced social tensions as has been demonstrated by Smith in his world wide survey of co-operative developments.¹⁰ And it would be highly misleading to give the impression that the socio-political dimension is relevant to only a small and rather special sub-set of the total number of innovations.¹¹ Adjustments to tenurial relationships, introduction of regulations regarding products and markets, diffusion of technical information on grades,

qualities, composition of farm inputs and outputs as well as price information - all such changes may affect the relative power positions of groups and individuals and thus become politically charged issues.

Related to the foregoing is the wider symbolic significance of certain innovations. Thus, for instance, an overtly economic instrument such as a co-operative may be readily accepted by farmers (and others) not only because of the economic and personal prestige benefits anticipated, but also because adoption links up with a complex of factors at the community or societal level. The innovation may be infused with a deeper meaning which derives directly from the emotional, political, or moral sensibilities of the individual. This feature is again best demonstrated by reference to a range of co-operative experience. Agricultural co-operation in Denmark assumed a special social significance because it could be readily identified with the nation's political and cultural revival.¹² In Finland co-operation became a vehicle for resurgent nationalism.¹³ In Britain the quite ideological consumer co-operative movement might be viewed as an instrument of working-class organisation, attracting adherents, in part because of its political and class coloration.¹⁴ In some African countries co-operative enthusiasts have been fired by nation building or quasi-racial considerations, for example, the transfer of trading functions from immigrant to indigenous groups.¹⁵ Further instances might be cited but the basic proposition - the general significance of these wider variables - is sufficiently illustrated. In the Irish case these considerations are somewhat complicated. Co-operation diffused through the countryside despite its lack of strong identifying characteristics of a national or sectarian kind. The co-operative message did, however, have an ideological gloss. But this was of a kind likely to appeal, in the main, to non-farming groups. Rather abstract principles stressing the value of self-help, democratic organisation, and community

development, were more likely to strike a responsive note among benevolent landlords and landagents, some clergymen, schoolteachers and others.¹⁶ Had the Irish co-operative movement developed as a more full-blooded organism, attuned to the passions and prejudices of its period, one may wonder if its course would have been smoother and its progress greater.

The role of time

Definition of the appropriate time unit is a problem which confronts most model builders. This is particularly important when using a static model of the present type. If the time period is set too wide then the probability of neglecting newly emerging forces is increased. The role of contingency in the unfolding of social action is largely ruled out.¹⁷ Further distortion may arise through neglecting the interplay of existing forces through time. Using a single time unit implicitly creates the impression that causal factors (i.e. the changing total environment in Stage I of the model) have been attributed particular and unvarying weights throughout the time period. Relating these general points directly to the Irish case study: the adoption of co-operative organisation was a response to vigorous propagandising in the early 1890s as well as unfavourable price movements in Irish agriculture. Nor did the environment of the individual farmer cease changing over the following decade in relation to this innovative item. At particular points in time some elements made for change favourable to co-operation while others tended to impede it, and the balance between various opposing forces varied through time.

A rather ironic illustration of this was the role played by the Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. In its early years it encouraged the formation of co-operatives, but within a decade, consequent on political changes in the wake of the Liberal

triumph of 1906 it adopted an antagonistic role. Of course the spread of an innovation may itself be a factor in the changing environment. Thus the early success of co-operation in the south of Ireland was significant in changing the external conditions facing farmers in other regions. An essentially static construct cannot allow for a process whereby later decision makers' behaviour is a function of the rate of innovation itself. It is of course possible to minimise this problem by taking a number of short consecutive time periods, and specifying the changing total environment anew in each case, although there are clear costs involved in view of the cumbersome nature of such a procedure. In the present case study the first 6-7 years is probably the maximum time period that can be regarded as reasonably uniform in terms of the operation of causal variables.

While these qualifications regarding use of the model appear valid, they should not be pressed too far. They represent a plea for critical application, and possibly some refinement of the theoretical structure, not a claim that it is seriously defective. Even if not entirely vindicated, the utility and generality of the model emerge with considerable force. A strength of the method, particularly in historical reconstruction is the provision of an explicit conceptual framework which aids the selection of data; unwitting reliance on concealed or subliminal processes is thus reduced.¹⁸ Comparative analysis is also facilitated. The existence and relevance of the different stages in adoption can be inferred from the historical data, in particular from the structure of arguments advanced by co-operative pioneers and the feedback they received at public meetings.¹⁹ Use of the model illuminates various elements in the co-operators' strategy, while this strategy is seen to bear directly on the most sensitive areas of the decision making process.

To conclude: we have presented a critique of a particular, though

representative type of innovation decision making model. The assessment is based on the use of the model in a study of the adoption of co-operative organisation in Ireland in the final decade of the nineteenth century. The main problems encountered related to the role of negative information flows in complicating decision making, the existence of a socio-political dimension to co-operative organisation, and the role of time in the model. It would seem though that the time and space constraints on the model are not as severe as might have been anticipated, thus pointing to its generality.

FOOTNOTES

1. G.E. Jones, 'The Adoption and Diffusion of Agricultural Practices', World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts, vol. IX, No. 3, 1967.
2. Aydelotte quoted in R. Floud, An Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Historians (London, 1973), p. 160.
3. G.E. Jones, 'Agricultural Innovation and Farmer Decision Making' in Agriculture (Open University, 1973).
4. E.R. Wolf, 'Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico', American Anthropologist, vol. 58, 1065-1078.
5. The role of non-farming groups in the spread of agricultural innovations has been noted by other commentators. Layton, for example, drawing on findings from his recent case study emphasises the role of garage owners in promoting the spread of modern farm equipment. He goes on to make the considerably broader point that "the widening of social contacts must be one of the most crucial aspects of the accelerating rate of change". See R. Layton, 'Pellaport' in F.G. Bailey (ed.) Debate and Compromise: The Politics of Innovation (Oxford, 1973), 48-74.
6. S.H. Franklin, Rural Societies (Macmillan Studies in Contemporary Europe, London, 1971).
7. The choicest comments in this vein are probably those contained in the Eagle and County Cork Advertiser in the 1890s.
8. J. Lee, Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918 (Dublin, 1973), p.126.
9. Decreasing uncertainty need not necessarily enhance the prospects of adoption. Publicising the dire consequences associated with use of an unsuitable form of drug, for example, would tend to both increase decision maker's knowledge and the probability of rejecting the proposed item.
10. L.P. Smith, The Evolution of Agricultural Co-operation (Oxford, 1961).
11. For more detailed discussion of these issues see: B. Galjart, 'Rural Development and Sociological Concepts: A Critique', Rural Sociology, vol. 36, 31-41; C. Yeracaris, 'Political Conflict and the Diffusion of Innovation', Rural Sociology, vol. 35, 488-499.
12. E.A. Pratt, Agricultural Organisation (London, 1912); H. Faber, Co-operation in Danish Agriculture (London, 1918); F.H. Webster, Agricultural Co-operation in Denmark (Oxford, 1973).
13. Smith, op.cit.
14. A.M. Carr-Saunders, et al, Consumers' Co-operation in Great Britain (London, 1938).

15. C.G. Widstrand (ed.), Co-operatives and Rural Development in East Africa (New York, 1971); M. Digby, Co-operatives (The Overseas Development Institute, London, n.d.).

16. See Appendix.

As with most social movements, co-operation sheltered under its broad programme a range of different social groupings, attracted to it for a variety of motives. For many farmers it must have represented little more than a cost saving innovation. For some landlords it was an (historically) late expression of noblesse oblige. For clergymen it could be a means of actively promoting the material welfare of their congregations. For idealists like George Russell and Horace Plunkett the co-operative slogan of "Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living" summarised their vision of a rural society radically transformed under the impact of the co-operative philosophy. For non-farming groups it is probably true to say that the extra-economic features of co-operation constituted the main points of attraction.

17. A good discussion of the role of contingency in history is G. Leff, History and Social Theory (London, 1969).

18. R.W. Fogel, 'The Specification Problem in Economic History', Journal of Economic History, vol. 27, 1967, 283-308.

19. We have a fairly clear notion of how the co-operative pioneers perceived the co-operative system from their various printed speeches, pamphlets, books. Similarly data on objective features of Irish agriculture in this period are readily accessible. The darkest area really is ordinary farmers' perceptions of co-operation. We cannot directly reconstruct their perspective on events from conventional sources. It is suggested though that considering the arguments of co-operative pioneers in the context of the decision making model offers clues as to the probable states of mind of the average farmer.

APPENDIX

Most Irish unionists were probably indifferent to the efforts of their fellow unionist, Horace Plunkett, in his attempts to promote agricultural co-operation in Ireland. However, it is also clear that a considerable number of mainly unionist landowners, land agents and others were responsive to his appeal. Thus when Plunkett made his early organising tours in the south of Ireland his work was much facilitated by use of his own particular ascendancy network. The disproportionate presence of such elements in the early stages of the movement is also revealed by an analysis of the lists of voluntary subscribers to the I.A.O.S. These lists are published as appendices to the I.A.O.S. annual reports. In 1895, out of a total of 350 or so subscribers, roughly a quarter held high military or honorary civil titles. The latter ranged through dukes, earls, lords to honourables at the bottom end of this sub-group. Possession of such military or civil titles is highly correlated with landownership and/or unionist conviction. At the more active level, landlords and/or unionist elements are disproportionately represented on the I.A.O.S. over the period under review. This may be contrasted with the underrepresentation of nationalists. A further indication of the social origins of the different types of co-operative activists (i.e. those who were prominent outside their local context) is furnished by Table I. This is derived from a breakdown of the 32 co-operators whose major contribution to Irish co-operation is given special recognition by R.A. Anderson in his autobiographical work. That this selection would command a broad measure of assent is suggested by other sources - the debates of the I.A.O.S. and reports of co-operative meetings, for example.

Table I. Social background of some leading co-operators

Landed gentry	8
Land agents	2
Deputy-lieutenants	4*
Clergymen	4+
Businessmen	5
Large farmers	1
Writers	1
Unknown	7
	<hr/>
	32

* This is not, of course, an occupational sub-group but the holders of such an office are more likely than not to come from substantial backgrounds with possible connections to the landed gentry. (The one large farmer noted later in the table, incidentally, is Coroner J. Byrne, a prominent farmer and cattlebreeder, and a moderate nationalist).

+ Two parish priests, one priest-academic (Fr. Finlay), and one Protestant minister.

One would not expect these patterns to be replicated at local level. However, a preliminary study of local co-operative meetings in the mid-1890s suggests that in the formative years of the movement considerable assistance was received from landlords, landagents and other non-farming groups. (Landlords, who of course sometimes farmed directly part of their estates, are deliberately excluded from our notion of non-farming groups. To mix landlords, tenant farmers, and labourers in the same category would be to distort utterly the nature of economic relationships in the countryside). It should be strongly emphasised, though, that our sample is small and while accounts of

meetings were taken at random from local newspapers it is not assumed that the sample is representative. The 40 meetings - relating mainly to creamery co-operatives - took place in 16 counties in the years 1895 and 1896. Our summary of the information gleaned from newsreports of these meetings is presented in Table 2, and is only intended to convey a general impression that needs to be brought into proper focus by a larger study.

Table 2. The total numbers from different social categories present and identified at 40 meetings on co-operation

<u>Category</u>		<u>Numbers</u>
I	Landlords or land agents	26
II	Men with military titles	13
III	Public officials	78
IV	Clergymen	42
V	Professionals	18
VI	Others	nos. unknown

Category II refers to those with the title of captain or above, and is probably closely related to category I. The third category refers mainly to justices of the peace, but also includes a minority of poor law guardians. The latter sub-group is likely to have included a fair proportion of nationalist traders and tenants but the former is more likely to hold a disproportionate number connected with the unionist camp. At least 20% of those in category IV are Protestant clergymen. Category V contains a mixed grouping of schoolteachers, doctors and others. The final category, by far the most significant numerically, is made up mainly of tenant farmers.

It is interesting to note also the status of the chairmen at

these meetings. This information, based on the previous sample of meetings and supplemented by some meetings recorded in Plunkett's diaries in the early 1890s, is set out in Table 3.

Table 3. Status of chairmen at 47 local meetings on co-operation

Landlords, land agents	9
Men with military titles	6
Public officials	10
Clergymen	16
Professionals	1
Others and unknown	<u>5</u>
Total	47

Table 3 tends to support previous impressions of disproportionate landed and unionist support for co-operation. A final comment on this table may be worth adding. Clergymen chaired one third of the meetings noted, but in no case did a Protestant minister perform this function despite the fact that such clergymen were sometimes present. Our sample of meetings is too small to support any firm interpretative comment but this rather intriguing feature, assuming it cannot be attributed wholly to sampling fluctuations, might be worthy of further exploration.

CHAPTER 4

THE SPREAD OF CO-OPERATIVE CREAMERIES

As creameries represent the dominant form of co-operative enterprise their particular diffusion pattern merits more attention than it was possible to provide within the context of our overview of co-operative development. We have seen that the first co-operative creamery was established at Drumcollogher, county Limerick, in 1889. This was followed in fairly rapid succession by other co-operative creameries in the Golden Vale region - the rich heartland of the Munster dairying industry. Five years after Drumcollogher one finds that co-operatives are still heavily concentrated in a band of southern counties. By the end of the first decade, however, one notes a sharp discontinuity in the pattern of geographical coverage. Rather than continuing to develop in close proximity to established centres, there is a jump from the southern to the northern end of the island, bypassing the midland and mid-west counties. Ulster becomes the new growth region as a fresh crop of creameries come into existence. An eastern boundary which is only slightly permeable is also taking shape. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century the contours of the co-operative creamery territory are clearly etched on the land surface. Further development is mainly concerned with filling in an existing creamery territory : opening new creameries to some extent but also taking over private enterprise creameries (as well as, of course, sometimes losing creameries to competitors).

These spread patterns have stimulated a number of hypotheses regarding farmers' behaviour. Noting that Ulster counties lagged behind the southern counties in adopting the co-operative innovation, the Rev. M. O'Riordan saw this as reflecting favourably on the

enterprise of the latter and, by implication, less favourably on that of the former.¹ (This is an element in his wider case that but for historical and institutional factors Catholic communities in Ireland would have been every bit as successful economically as the allegedly more enterprising Protestants of the north-east). More recently, in the course of a brilliant essay on creamery co-operation, Dr. O Grada compares the rate and extent of diffusion of co-operatives in Ireland generally and Limerick in particular, with the Danish experience, and suggests that the usual unfavourable contrasts between the two in terms of economic behaviour may be in need of revision.² As a further prop to his argument, Dr. O Grada develops two mathematical models which are interpreted as showing that the spread of creameries is largely, if not wholly explicable by reference to economic factors.³ In terms of this analysis a favourable light is thrown on the innovative characteristics of Irish farmers. These various lines of thought are now examined in some detail.

Supply and Demand Factors in Relation to Innovation

In the early stages of diffusion supply factors - availability of the innovation, possibilities for trial, information services - are of crucial importance. Normally at this point the supply conditions are the major determinants of where and when adoption takes place. Through time demand factors assume a greater significance. These preliminary observations suggest that in considering differences in diffusion patterns (differences in the rate of adoption and the extent of adoption) between regions or countries one does well to begin with supply side conditions.

The initial supply of information regarding co-operative organisation is almost wholly due to the efforts of a small group of enthusiasts,

in particular Plunkett and Anderson. It is only with the formation of the I.A.O.S. in 1894 that such activities are fully institutionalised. So by reference to Plunkett's diaries, supplemented by newspaper reports and later accounts of the early propaganda work, we can trace out in a fairly rough fashion the districts which were exposed to information on co-operative organisation, and just as importantly, note those in which the innovation was unavailable on similar terms at particular points in time. In the early years it appears that organising activity was concentrated in the Limerick, north Cork, north Kerry and south Tipperary areas.⁴ Less sustained forays were made into Kilkenny, Waterford, and Clare. Thus the districts most intensively canvassed also happen to be those best suited to the dairying industry. In 1893 Plunkett and Anderson engage in a brief tour of Donegal,⁵ but two further years elapse before the co-operative message is vigorously circulated in the northern counties. Anderson relates to a meeting of tenant farmers on the Brassey estate near Londonderry as late as October 1895 that his experience of organising work in Ulster was extremely limited.⁶ By 1895, however, the I.A.O.S. is firmly in existence and information and assistance regarding the formation and development of co-operative organisation is available on a systematic basis. A co-operative newspaper, the Irish Homestead, is vigorously commending the new movement to Irish farmers and labourers. Supply factors, at least in relation to creamery diffusion, no longer represent a major constraint on co-operative adoption in different regions of the country.

Before leaving aside the supply aspects of the innovation for the present it is important to stress one important point. Co-operative organisation was promoted with great zeal, first by a group of philanthropists whose exertions sometimes border on the extreme, and later by the I.A.O.S. whose pioneer workers absorbed much of the millenarian

fire. Thus in the autumn of 1890 one reads of Plunkett and Anderson rising at dawn, driving through cold and rain, seeking to interest farmers in the new system of organisation. "Arrived at 8 p.m. very tired this being the seventh meeting addressed in five days."⁷ Anderson who bore the brunt of the organising work recalls that in one month he "slept in thirty different places sometimes on the seat of a night train, with no covering other than my frieze overcoat."⁸ Such was the crusading spirit of the pioneers that these brief excerpts do not appear to be highly untypical. By 1895, as well as Anderson and the assistant secretary of the I.A.O.S. there were five additional organisers active in the field. The I.A.O.S. annual report of that year records the attendance of at least one of these at a massive total of 315 meetings held during the year.⁹ The annual report of the following year states that no fewer than 241 co-operative meetings were organised in new areas alone during the previous twelve months.¹⁰ Thus it is apparent that a powerful wave of propaganda activity, originating and largely sustained from outside the farming community, carried co-operative ideas across the country in the early 1890s. The economic effect of these activities is presumably to reduce the supply price of the innovation to farmers through lowering the uncertainty surrounding co-operative innovation and lowering the cost of relevant information to farmers. The wider significance of this is that the more strongly one emphasises supply factors, the more heavily is farmers' innovative behaviour qualified. Thus, for instance, if the supply price of the co-operative innovation in Ireland was less than that in Denmark then, other things being equal, any comparison of innovative behaviour between the two countries has a bias (of some undefined magnitude) in favour of Ireland.

This summary treatment of the supply of the co-operative innovation helps shed light on some of the issues referred to earlier. Faced with identical supply curves the rate of adoption of an innovation by farmer groups who are similarly placed - net benefit from innovating is the same for each - is a clear index of relative propensities to innovate. Needless to say these ceteris paribus assumptions are difficult to fulfil in real world situations, but before making strong inferences regarding innovative behaviour the historian must be reasonably satisfied that the historical evidence is broadly compatible with such assumptions. In terms of this criterion one can immediately fault O'Riordan's comments on the north-south contrast in relation to adoption of co-operation. Quite simply, since the innovation was not available in the northern counties for some years after it was supplied in the south,¹¹ any comparison over a time interval dominated by this lag is necessarily misleading. To roughly adjust for this complicating feature we adopt the following procedure : Taking the existence of at least one co-operative creamery in a province as a proxy for the availability of the innovation, we then compare the extent of creamery formation in Munster and Ulster in their first decades (1889-1899 and 1895-1905 respectively).

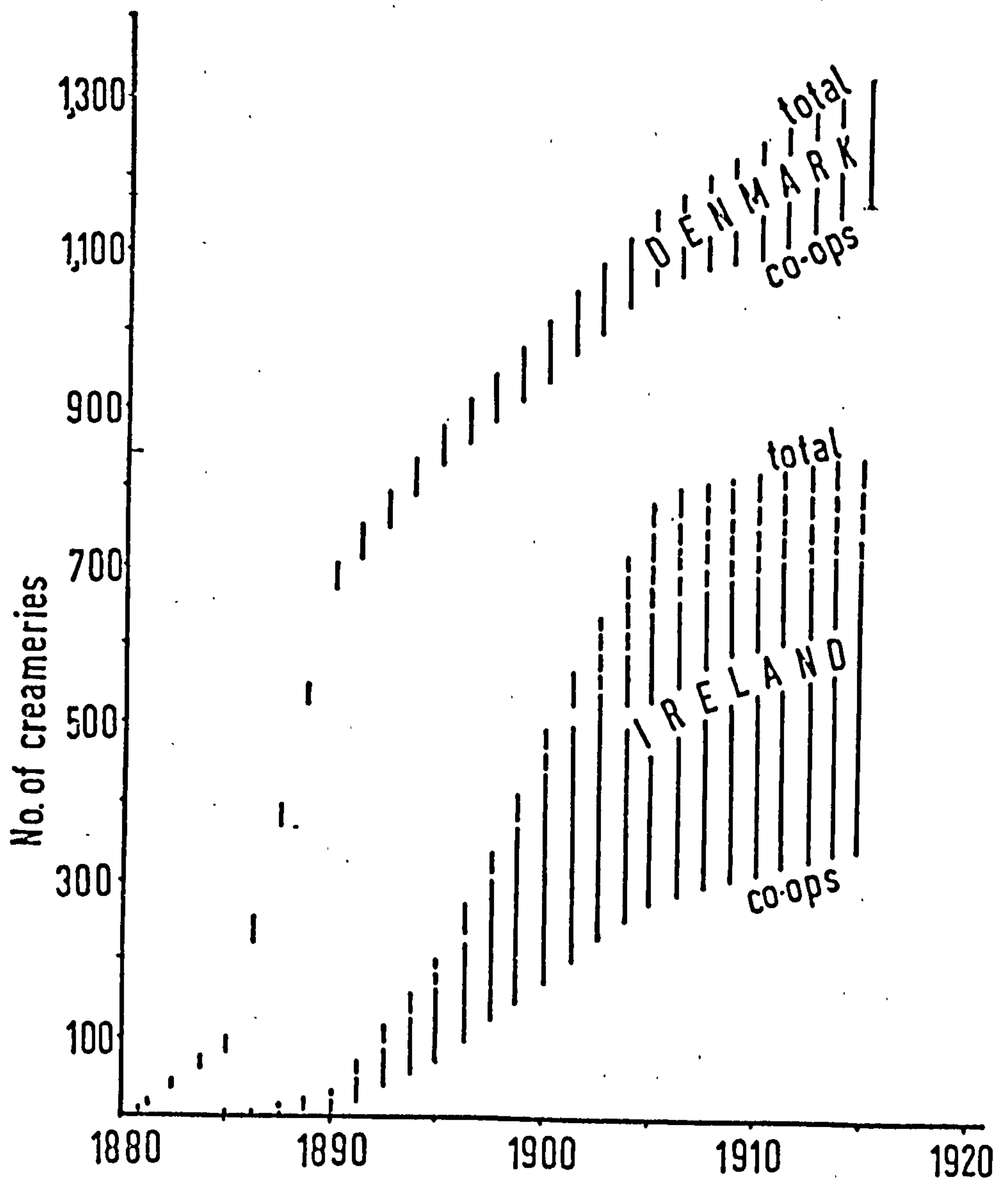
Over the period 1889-99 the Munster co-operatives developed to reach a level of 64 - an average of 10.7 creameries per county. In Ulster, in its first decade of co-operative development, 108 creameries or an average of 12 per county were established.¹² Another way of looking at relative performance within this north-south framework is to express these levels of co-operative formation as a fraction of total co-operative formation at the end of our study period in 1914. This provides a further measure of the extent of co-operative progress achieved in the first decade of co-operative propagation in each of the two

provinces. Thus of the total number of creameries formed in Munster by 1914, less than half (44%) had been established by the end of the first decade of co-operative growth. For Ulster the corresponding ratio is markedly higher, being 73%. Perhaps then the point at issue should be, not whether northern farmers lagged behind southern farmers, but rather the reverse? There is clearly little comfort for O'Riordan in these spread patterns, but while the evidence seems to suggest that his observation should be stood on its head such a position is not without its difficulties either. The profitability of creameries was almost certainly greater in the south¹³ so the incentive to innovate was greater there. On the other hand the existence of successful working models in other parts of Ireland reduced the level of uncertainty facing potential northern adopters. It would be too convenient to assume that these two distorting features cancel each other out (though they do at least work in opposite directions). There is the further problem that Munster co-operatives had to compete with a more firmly based private enterprise system. It seems reasonable to assume that this impeded rapid expansion initially somewhat.¹⁴ One may conclude then that on the evidence supplied by the adoption of co-operative organisation there is no unambiguous basis on which to argue marked differences in the economic responses of farmers at different ends of the island, religious and other cultural differences notwithstanding. However at the risk of gravitating from a position of excessive blandness towards one of rashness, the weaker judgment may be proffered that, despite the imperfect nature of the comparison, the innovative behaviour of Ulster farmers emerges as the more impressive of the two. It should be emphasised though that a properly conducted north-south contrast would require comparison over a range of innovative items. Co-operative organisation is but one element in such a comparison.

In relation to the Danish and Irish experiences of co-operation it is obviously even more difficult to control for the various factors influencing the rate of acceptance in the two countries. Dr. O Grada takes the very sensible, but easily overlooked precaution of selecting an Irish region - county Limerick - which he says is broadly similar to Danish dairying conditions. Other Irish regions with much lower milk densities per square mile are clearly not suitable for comparative purposes. He concludes: "Perhaps the Irish performance did not quite match the Danish. Still the Irish farmer came a very honourable second."¹⁵ One wishes we had more runners though; in a two horse race it is not always easy to judge an honourable second. It would seem to be the case that where Irish conditions were most similar to those obtaining in Denmark diffusion proceeded almost as far, that is, the ceiling values in terms of the acceptance of the creamery innovation were not noticeably different. By 1914, dairying districts in the two countries which were suited to the new system were saturated with creameries. However the timing of innovation was earlier and the rate of diffusion considerably faster in the Danish case, and these rather than the eventual extent of innovation would appear to be the crucial indicators of innovativeness. Figure I shows the cumulative totals of Irish and Danish creameries, both co-operative and private enterprise, through time.¹⁶ A visual comparison of the slopes of the diffusion curves over the first decade or so for each of the two countries suggests significant differences in the respective rates of development. Indeed in the period 1885-90 in Denmark a phenomenal 511 co-operative creameries were built or almost one third of all the co-operative creameries established between 1881 and 1914.¹⁷ By contrast progress in Ireland is steadier and slower while the effective starting point is at least five years later. Interestingly the rate of development of co-operative creameries over much of

FIGURE 1

Creamery Development, Co-operative and Private, in Ireland
and Denmark over the period 1880-1914



the time period is slower in the Irish case than that of private creameries. Dr. O Grada quite rightly points out that the prominence of the proprietary sector in Ireland is understandable in terms of the prior history of the Irish butter trade. Butter merchants and others associated with the trade were well placed to implement the new system of butter manufacture. However, this does not appear to constitute a sufficient explanation for the different patterns of development in the two countries. After all, Denmark had been a considerable exporter of butter since at least 1870. Butter wholesaling had been mainly conducted by merchants, not farmers. Co-operative creameries did not initially engage in marketing their own butter but rather tended to rely on existing wholesalers.¹⁸ Yet the massive adoption of co-operative organisation is almost wholly due to the actions of farmers. Very little of this achievement is attributable to groups servicing the agricultural sector. Even if one takes Munster, the Irish region most suited to dairying and the creamery system, one finds that of a total of roughly 200 creameries in 1895, only 50 are co-operatively owned.¹⁹ Even in the county of Limerick, farmers control less than half of the milk processing business.²⁰ It would seem, therefore, that the extension of the creamery system in Munster, and to a lesser extent in other regions, is more indicative of entrepreneurial alertness on the part of merchants (and others) than of farmers.

It may be objected that in districts where private enterprise had not secured a headstart on co-operatives their respective shares of total milk processing are more evenly balanced. This is true but the more significant implication of this is to point up the importance of supply factors for the development of Irish co-operation. In Denmark creamery co-operation seems to have been embraced more wholeheartedly by farmers in a very short space of time following the successful

formation of the first creamery at Hjedding in western Jutland in 1881-2.

It is evident from Figure I that the role of private creameries was slight.

This is how Jensen describes the origins of the system in Denmark:²¹

... the Danish co-operative movement is an independently developed, farmer-created movement. It was planned and developed by the farmers themselves independently of events in other countries and without any outside guidance or support. Working farmers were organising to do business in an improved way and did not know they were founding a co-operative movement...

The Hjedding creamery was an economic success, and this fact soon became known outside the creamery's own territory. From far away came groups of farmers to familiarise themselves with the methods used and the results obtained, and in a few years co-operative creameries were organised by the hundreds. 'A wave has arisen near the North Sea and is sweeping the whole country', it was said by one of the farm leaders of that time.

By contrast, intensive propaganda from outside the farming community was necessary to overcome Irish farmers' initial scepticism and inertia.²²

The effective adoption by Danish farmers of other forms of co-operation - store co-operatives, meat processing, various marketing federations, credit societies - serves to underline the considerable differences in innovative responses between the two countries in relation to group innovations.²³

A more general implication of our emphasis on supply factors in innovation is to direct a favourable light on the activities of Horace Plunkett and his band of co-operative pioneers. Plunkett and his fellow-workers were quite clear that they had not saved the Irish dairying industry from ruin.²⁴ They appreciated that private enterprise would have effected the transition from a domestic to a factory system of butter manufacture. Their major achievement in this area of the rural economy then was not to establish creameries but rather to determine the ownership structure of many of the creameries formed. Co-operative ownership, it may be added, was the form that was ultimately to prevail. In the absence of Plunkett, it is reasonable to conclude, control of milk processing would have passed largely out of the hands of farmers.

Certainly a string of farmers' joint-stock companies would have developed²⁵ but whether this would have protected the bulk of creamery suppliers, as distinct from a core of substantial farmers from monopolistic practices may be doubted. In any case, given the firm footing achieved by other creameries in the early 1890s, it is quite unlikely that a farmer response of significant proportions would have developed along joint-stock lines.

The Uneven Spread of Creameries

We have already noted that co-operative or other creameries did not spread evenly across the country. This is readily explained by reference to established patterns of production in Irish agriculture. Many districts were better adapted to forms of farming activity other than dairying. Less obviously explained though is the fact that creameries did not extend to all dairying districts. In 1922 almost half the milk of the country was not finding its way into creameries.²⁶ Dr. O Grada contends that by 1914 diffusion of the creamery innovation had proceeded as far as was profitable, given locational and technical constraints. To operate successfully a creamery needs a minimum milk supply within a catchment area which is not so extensive as to make milk transport costs prohibitive. Some dairying districts could not satisfy these conditions and so continued with home butter production (sometimes adopting small hand separators) or switched to other farming lines. In areas with an urban concentration nearby, direct milk sales were more attractive than butter production. Thus Dr. O Grada suggests the following model to explain creamery dispersion and tests this against co-operative data for the year 1913.²⁷

$$CR = a + b \text{ MCPA} + c \text{ COW} - d \text{ POP}$$

Expressed in commoner symbols, the number of creameries per county or per poor-law union (CR) is a function of milch cow density (MCPA), availability of dairying land (COW), and population (POP). Milch cow numbers are used here as a proxy for dairying land. Incorporation of the variable milch cow density into the model reflects in an approximate way the role of distance and transport cost factors. The signs of the co-efficients in the regression equations turn out to be as expected, but strictly speaking only the co-efficient for population can be interpreted. This is because the two-way causation present in the historical situation cannot be accommodated within the confines of the model.²⁸ Thus while creamery numbers in a particular geographical entity are a function of milch cow density and cow numbers, these are in turn a function of creamery development - as the redistribution of the national cow herd in the wake of creamery development indicates.²⁹ By 1913, after a quarter century of co-operative growth, farming adjustments and readjustments, the one-way causation postulated (creamery numbers responding passively to existing values for MCPA and COW) can only be accepted as a crude simplifying assumption. However, these qualifications should not be pushed too far. There can be little doubt that milch cow density and dairying land are each positively correlated with creamery numbers both at a late point in time such as 1913, when the system is roughly in equilibrium, and also at earlier points in time.

Essentially this statistical exercise suggests certain correlates of creamery development. (To go further and regard these relationships as constituting an explanation of the spread of creameries would be to engage in an unacceptable form of reductionism). Dr. O Grada supplements the cross-sectional tests with the aid of a further regression model which relates the profitability of creameries to their date of establishment (or age), thus conferring a very interesting longitudinal dimension to

this part of the study. "Not only were creameries scarce in unpromising locations : it also seems that co-operative creameries at least were set up first where the highest returns were most likely to accrue."³¹ If this is indeed so then the role of purely economic considerations in determining where and when creameries first budded is heavily underlined. A high level of economic rationality on the part of the farming population is implied while emphasis on the role of supply factors, as in this chapter, seems misplaced.

The crucial equation is as follows:³²

$$S_{1913} = 52,232 - 1,588 D$$

(14.9) (5.8)

S_{1913} = milk supply in 1913 (a proxy for creamery profitability)

D = date of foundation

R^2 = 0.12

N = 237

The first point to be noted is that the relationship is very weak ($R^2 = 0.12$); little over 10% of the variation in the profitability of creamery enterprises is explicable by reference to date of establishment. Furthermore, there are at least three reasons why even this weak relationship may be doubted. These are now elaborated.

The interpretation of the above equation offered is that the potentially most profitable sites were worked first, superior profit opportunities motivating more rapid adoption than in less favoured locations. But this is not the only possible interpretation. It is also possible that creameries required a developmental period in coming to full profitability (as is the common experience of new firms). If this is so then the later creameries are somewhat unfairly treated in the test. In the context of the dairying industry one would expect lags in

acquiring market knowledge, developing commercial contacts, and accumulating managerial and technical experience.³³ Economies might also accrue from changes in the local farming environment, as for instance, farmers increased their cow herds in response to the emergence of creameries in a particular district.³⁴ As creameries operated under conditions of increasing returns to scale over most of the relevant range, inducing an increased milk supply would lower unit costs.³⁵ Such economies would not be immediately available to new creameries, thus tending to yield a spurious relationship between late formation and low profitability.

Another problem, one which arises from the neglect of supply factors in relation to the diffusion process, should be considered. The creamery innovation was first made available in the region best suited to the new system, that is in the province of Munster. Historical accident, as we have seen earlier, rather than compelling economic incentive is the explanation here. Quite clearly this chance factor is not neutral in terms of its influence on the test, rather it is a distorting feature which contributes to the impression that the most favourable locations were developed first because they were the most profitable.

However the most important, and methodologically most interesting problem relates to the actual creamery data themselves. The data used to test the model relate only to those co-operative creameries still in existence in 1913. Thus competitive forces had been operating on the system for almost a quarter of a century. Not surprisingly the least profitable firms, some of which had been established quite early on, had been eliminated.³⁶ To describe the 1913 list of creameries as historical remnants or survivors would be to overstate the point as the failure rate was not especially high, but the 1913 creameries represent, nonetheless, a biased sample of the total population. Given the

hypothesis under test, it seems that the relevant population should be defined as all co-operative creameries that existed for any length of time between the inception of the movement and 1913. Use of the "full" data set would dilute further the already weak relationship that appears to exist between creamery profitability and date of establishment. (The wider significance of this last point in the writing of business history may be briefly noted. Definition of the appropriate population of firms when making general statements about an industry or sub-industry will vary according to the purposes in mind. The submerged strata - the business failures - are easily overlooked, but in some circumstances are as relevant to the explorations of the business historian as the more visible survivors).

Overall, the three distorting features operate in the same direction and bias the outcome of the test in a manner favourable to the original hypothesis of a relationship between profitability and date of establishment. In view of the foregoing, little credence can be placed in this.

We may now summarise our view of the unfolding of the co-operative creamery system in space and time. Creameries were established within the traditional dairying regions from about 1890 onwards. To say that creameries were established only where a milk supply was available is not perhaps very illuminating, but the extension of the creamery system to some but not all dairying districts can be explained largely in terms of differences in area milk densities and the availability of more economical alternatives to creamery processing in some districts. The fact that the co-operative system developed first in the south of the country and later in the northern counties appears to be largely fortuitous. It cannot be explained primarily in terms of greater innovativeness in the south or the existence of larger profit opportunities there. Interpreting

the spread of co-operatives largely or exclusively in economic terms tends to obscure the role of important mediating factors. The spatial and temporal patterns traced out by the emerging creamery system were the outcome of complex human, geographical and economic processes. Finally our brief, and necessarily incomplete contrast of Danish and Irish co-operation does not incline us to accept a strongly revisionist view of relative performance in the two countries.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rev. M. O'Riordan, Catholicity and Progress in Ireland (London, 1906), p. 231-2.
2. C. O Grada, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914', Economic History Review, XXX, 1977, 284-305. Dr. O Grada succeeds in compressing an enormous range of issues into this single article and may be said to pioneer the analytical study of many areas of Irish co-operative history. On the whole, only points of disagreement relating to the spread of creameries are raised here. At the risk of creating the impression of detracting from the general excellence of the paper I ignore many other issues covered in the paper (in particular those on which our views coincide). I might also add that these dissenting comments are in part a form of self-criticism as I have now seen fit to retract some of my earlier views on the spread of co-operation.
3. Ibid., p. 289. "The diffusion of the system was dictated mainly, if not entirely, by commercial considerations."
4. Plunkett Diaries, 1889-1892, passim.
5. Ibid., 4-7 Nov. 1893.
6. Belfast News-Letter, 22 Oct. 1895; Northern Whig 22 Oct. 1895.
7. Plunkett Diaries, 1 Oct. 1890.
8. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), p.33.
9. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895, pp. 4-5.
10. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1896, p. 5.
11. Put more precisely: the co-operative innovation was not available on similar terms to the northerners until several years after the southern movement got under way. No doubt a vague knowledge of the existence of the system was present in some farming circles in Ulster in the early 1890s, but detailed expositions of the working of the new system as well as the practical and ideological stimuli of the pioneer co-operators were lacking. Similarly one might note that some knowledge of recent developments in the technology of milk processing (in particular the invention of the centrifugal separator) was available to Irish farmers in the early 1880s but, despite the efforts of some early enthusiasts, it was not until the following decade that farmers responded in any substantial numbers.

On the activities of some dairy reformers who preceded Plunkett and his fellow co-operators see O Grada, loc. cit. pp. 288-9 and W.L. Stokes, 'Irish Creameries', Co-operative Wholesale Society Annual (Manchester) 1897, 421-3.
12. These figures, and the calculations immediately following in the main text, are based on data contained in I.A.O.S. annual reports for 1895, 1899, and 1914.

The Ulster creameries handled, on average, smaller quantities

- of milk so one would expect rather more of them to a given area. On the other hand the average Ulster creamery had a larger number of farmer-suppliers, while of course the mean county size in Ulster was considerably smaller than in Munster.
13. One indication of this is the earlier development of private creameries in the south. Note also O Grada, loc. cit. p. 294 and the evidence presented therein (based on I.A.O.S. data on regional differences in milk prices).
 14. As against this, the existence of working models, even if privately owned, must have been of some benefit in reassuring farmers of the viability of the system.
 15. O Grada loc. cit. p. 300.
 16. This is taken from O Grada p. 296.
 17. E. Jensen, Danish Agriculture : Its Economic Development (Copenhagen, 1937), p. 324. Note also F.H. Webster, Agricultural Co-operation in Denmark (Oxford, 1973), p. 139.
 18. Jensen op.cit. pp. 322, 326.
 19. Agricultural Statistics of Ireland for the Year 1895 (BPP, 1896, XCII), p. 331.
 20. In 1893 (figures not available for 1895) there were 49 dairy factories, mainly creameries, in Limerick of which 20 were co-operatively owned. Agricultural Statistics of Ireland 1893 (BPP, XCIII, 1894), p. 196.
 21. Jensen op.cit. pp. 319, 322.
 22. In fairness to the Irish farmer it should be added that the opposition of vested interest groups, including politicians was strong in the Irish case (though creamery co-operation was far from being the most controversial form of co-operation).
 23. Danish credit co-operatives predated their Irish counterparts by almost half a century. Consumer co-operatives, to take one further example, spread rapidly through rural Denmark in the 1880s while attempts to propagate this form of organisation in Ireland met with practically no success. According to Webster (p. 139) there were 550 such societies in Denmark in 1891, almost all of them located in rural areas. Note also Anderson, op.cit. pp. 99-100.
 24. H. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century (London, 1904), pp. 187-88.
 25. Plunkett records the existence of some such ventures in the Golden Vale region. See Plunkett Diaries 28 April 1890, 27 Sept. 1890, 28 Sept. 1890.
 26. O Grada loc. cit. p. 291. Note also J. O'Donovan, The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland (Cork, 1940), pp. 326-7.
 27. O Grada, pp. 293-4.

28. A larger model - a simultaneous equation system - would be required to fully cope with the problem of mutual dependence.
29. The national cow herd numbered 1,400,000 in 1890 and 1,534,000 in 1913 - an increase of 9.5%. However if one compares the strongly dairying province of Munster, where creameries were established on an extensive scale, with a weak creamery region such as Leinster one finds that the cow population increased by some 16% in the former as against 5% in the latter. (Indeed one county - the dairying county of Kilkenny - alone accounts for more than half the increase in Leinster). The strong creamery counties registered increases in cow numbers that well exceeded the increase at national level over the period 1890-1913. Thus Limerick, Cork, Tipperary, Kilkenny showed gains of 15%, 18%, 20% and 20% respectively. Agricultural Statistics of Ireland 1890 (BPP, LXXIX, 1890); Agricultural Statistics 1913 (BPP, XCVIII, 1914). It is probable that these changes in the spatial distribution of cows are more pronounced at the level of smaller geographical units than that of the county. It should be added that we are not attempting to attribute all such change to developments in dairy technology - spread of creameries, hand separators and the like - but it seems impossible not to accord major significance to these factors.
30. One expects these relationships to be weaker at some but not necessarily all earlier points in time.
31. O Grada p. 294.
32. Ibid. p. 294. T-statistics are in brackets.
33. "Also I notice that the proprietary factory as a rule pays the highest prices for milk. The owner is generally a butter merchant, and owing to his trade knowledge he obtains a price for his butter, which enables him to pay as much or more for milk as the united farmers do at present, and have a decent profit afterwards. His management is also better and sounder" - writer in the Irish Farming World, 25 Nov. 1892. The writer goes on to suggest that until the farmers' societies succeed in developing their methods of selling butter they cannot claim an advantage over private concerns. The competitiveness of co-operative creameries in our period implies that farmers succeeded in overcoming initial management and marketing problems.
34. The empirical basis for this point has been noted earlier in this chapter.
35. This is apparent from I.A.O.S. data on milk prices paid by various size-categories of creameries. This data for the years 1913 and 1918 is conveniently summarised and arranged in O Grada loc. cit. p. 294.
36. Of the 84 co-operative creameries registered as being in existence on the 31 March 1897, a quarter of these had disappeared by 1913. This, in fact, understates the failure rate of the early creameries as those that had failed prior to 1897 would not appear on this list. The location of the failures and the numbers involved (figure in brackets) were as follows: Limerick (4), Cork (4), Clare (3), Tipperary (3), Kilkenny (2), Waterford (1), Kerry (1), Leitrim (1), Londonderry (1), Carlow (1), Tyrone (1). Nine of these had failed prior to the 31 March 1892; suggesting that early establishment and profitability are

not necessarily correlated.

Our general point is, perhaps, brought out most sharply in the case of Clare. In 1913 the county boasted a single co-operative creamery, formed in that year. This is a good indication that the creamery system was unprofitable there. Yet to infer from this that a low (or negative) level of profitability prevented the early establishment of creameries there is to neglect historical evidence relating to the years prior to 1913. Taking only the first five years of co-operative propagation (1889-1894) at least three Clare creameries - Labasheeda, Kildysart, and Kilfenora - had been formed. Not a trace of these appears in the 1913 statistics. Thus while an end view of co-operation in Clare shows little sign of activity, viewed through time an interesting array of creamery wrecks becomes apparent.

The data forming the basis of these comments are derived from I.A.O.S. annual reports - in particular Annual Report 1897, appendix C and Annual Report 1914, pp. 76-95 of the statistical appendices.

THE EARLY RESPONSE OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC
CLERGY TO THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The primary aim of this chapter is to form an assessment of the role of the Roman Catholic (R.C.) clergy in agricultural co-operative development, drawing on evidence from the last decade of the 19th and the first decade or so of the 20th century. It is hardly possible however to treat such activity in isolation from the manifold pre-occupations of rural society, as in practice no clear demarcation existed between economic and non-economic activity. An attempt is made to place such clerical activity in the cultural context of rural society, while simultaneously paying attention to the specific ideological, pastoral and economic preoccupations of the clergy - the latter viewed as a distinctive social category with affiliations not only within the rural community, but extending beyond it also.

The importance of the clerical response in influencing the prospects of any social or economic development in rural Ireland requires no amplification. Because of the democratic nature of co-operative organisation - requiring as it does mass participation by sections of a rural community - this position of strategic importance is likely to have been even more heavily underlined. It is probably not an exaggeration to state that in some areas clerical acquiescence was a necessary condition for co-operative progress in the formative period. Moreover, clerical numbers had increased steadily from about 5,000 priests, monks and nuns in 1850 to over 14,000 in 1900 - despite a falling lay population.¹ In addition another key social category was increasing in relative terms in the late 19th century. This was the traders - publicans, shopkeepers, dealers in agricultural inputs and outputs. After the clergy, the traders formed the most influential non-farming element in rural society.

As a form of check on our analysis and lines of interpretation the role of the clergy in related areas of rural economic activity is briefly considered. A certain measure of consistency in clerical behaviour should emerge within this comparative framework, or at least deviations should be explicable by reference to special extenuating factors. Otherwise a lower level of probability must be ascribed to our findings. Making use of this broadened context some tentative generalisations are made regarding the clerical role in rural society over the time period relevant to this study.

The institutional church: economic and social ideals

Rerum Novarum² published in 1891 signified Pope Leo XIII's willingness to attempt a reconciliation between the R.C. Church and modern industrialising society. Leo XIII's stricture to "bridge the abyss between the priest and the people,"³ believed to have arisen out of the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, was unnecessary in the Irish case. Industrialisation in Ireland was limited and showed a high degree of regional concentration, and in rural Ireland a reverse process had been under way. Thus for the greater part the R.C. Church operated within a socio-economic environment which traditionally had proved conducive to Catholic orthodoxy.

The Irish R.C. Hierarchy was poised delicately between the institutions of British civil authority and those of the nationalist (predominantly Roman Catholic) population, extracting advantage from both.⁴ At parish level the identification of chapel and cabin was more complete. Given that Catholicism and nationalism were almost perfectly correlated, that the social origins of the Irish clergy lay to a very considerable extent in rural Ireland,⁵ and that both priests and laity subscribed to a common, though highly selective and sometimes misleading view of Irish history, the unity of priest and people is not unexpected. It is impressive nonetheless.

Factors which further reinforced these bonds were the exclusion of the local clergy from the more prestigious (usually Protestant) segments of society and a pervasive sense of being bounded by alien institutions, regarded as inimical to Roman Catholicism.⁶ As L. Paul-Dubois⁷ commented in 1908: "The Catholic clergy have never ceased to regard their flock as the object of the snares set by Protestantism". It is perhaps well to bear this psychological climate in mind when attempting to interpret later events.

The position of the R.C. Church on economic policy may be briefly and somewhat crudely summarised as follows: maximise the numbers of people on the land as this is more conducive to the "good" life⁸ and where possible develop alternative employment opportunities to stem emigration and its associated hazard - leakage from the R.C. faith. A practical implication of this was large scale redistribution of land, and population flows from areas with unfavourable man-land ratios - generally the western regions of the country - to areas less densely populated. In a joint pastoral letter in 1900, the bishops signified their support for such a land policy. "... the great grass plains that are at present worthless to their owners, and are economically lost to the country" should be returned to the poverty stricken Irish peasant.⁹ Political constraints, however, ruled out any massive structural changes in Irish agriculture. The Congested Districts Board (C.D.B.) operated a policy of land redistribution on a modest scale, and this had the support of the Irish bishops. A C.D.B. scheme of land division on Clare Island, for instance, had the moral and financial backing of the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. McEvilly.¹⁰

Striking confirmation of the effectiveness with which the notion of the superiority of rural life was communicated to the lay Roman Catholic is furnished by this extract from a taped interview with a

townsman who is now approaching 80 years of age. Referring to Dr. Kelly, Bishop of Ross, and an acknowledged specialist on economic matters, and to Dean White P.P. of Nenagh he recalls: "They regarded the land you see as the great asset of the country, which it was, and that character, (pause) that even character was formed by the land." Continuing, he suggests that the clergy of this period were not opposed to industrial development, rather they wished to see it "allied to the economy of the country" and that between agriculture and industry there should be "a good balance, but the land should be the greater".

Nor were all forms of economic development to be welcomed uncritically, by some of the clergy at least. A Belfast or a Birmingham might not be intrinsically "hostile to the spirit of the Catholic Church", according to the Rev. T.F. Macken,¹¹

But it is emphatically not the ideal to be striven after and attained in this country. If we are to look abroad for examples, it is to be hoped that Ireland will develop after the model of Belgium or Denmark rather than on the lines of those countries where the land is deserted, and where the toiling millions are congregated in large cities and towns, and leading lives of moral and physical degradation... The farm is known to be the best place to bring up worthy sons and daughters... And so in Ireland the land industry must be cultivated first of all, and other industries must be brought to the homes of the people...

Clearly the pattern of development favoured by many of the clergy was at variance with the experience, and probably the requirements of modern industrial societies. It is interesting to note, though, that agricultural co-operatives would seem to fit almost perfectly within the framework of clerical preferences regarding organisation and type of economic activity. If the clerical response to co-operation was shaped solely by Church social ideals then a uniformly favourable reaction is to be anticipated. But then life is rarely so simple, even for men whose kingdom lies elsewhere.

Two hypotheses and some evidence

In relation to the formation of co-operative societies it is possible to envisage two polar positions on the part of the R.C. clergy.¹² One might hypothesise that the R.C. clergy in general sought to actively promote the cause of agricultural co-operation. A second hypothesis is that the clergy worked actively to impede such developments. It should be pointed out immediately that in so far as this matter has received attention the consensus of opinion is in favour of hypothesis one.¹³ The orthodox interpretation lauds the widespread participation of clergy in co-operative endeavour.

The evidence in favour of this interpretation is impressive. Horace Plunkett in a brief reference on page 119 of Ireland in the New Century notes that of the co-operative societies organised by the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society "there are no fewer than 331 societies of which the local priests are the Chairmen, while to my own knowledge during the summer and autumn of 1902, as many as 50,000 persons from all parts of Ireland were personally conducted over the exhibit of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction at the Cork Exhibition by their local clergy." Other writers, while not providing quantitative evidence of this kind, carry a similar theme of constructive clerical involvement.

Further such co-operative developments were congruent with the R.C. Church's social thinking and the interest of that Church in stabilising the rural population, and promoting smaller scale industry where possible. The Irish Catholic newspaper spoke in approving terms of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I.A.O.S.), "It is simply the truth to say that the work of the Irish Agricultural Organisation is planned exactly on those lines of co-operation which the sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII, has so strongly commended to the workers of the world. It is eminently gratifying to be able to infer from the course of the

proceedings at the Conference, that the counsels of the Pope are destined to bear permanent fruit in the country..."¹⁴ The first annual report of the I.A.O.S. states that in many districts its success is largely due to the help of the R.C. clergy.¹⁵

The obvious point of departure in subjecting these claims to more detailed scrutiny is the private diaries of the leading co-operator, Horace Plunkett. These are referred to hereafter as the Plunkett Diaries. That Plunkett was sensitive to the temporal power of the R.C. clergy there can be little doubt. His diaries indicate that as a co-operative pioneer (and also as a member of the C.D.B.) he made a special effort to try and enlist their support for his work. The organisation of local meetings was sometimes preceded by a call on the local clergy or on occasion a visit to the Bishop. Thus for instance Plunkett did not hesitate to approach Bishop Coffey in Killarney to "get his assistance with the Priest at Listowel".¹⁶ Bishop Dwyer of Limerick in whose area much early co-operative development took place became a respected acquaintance. It should be noted however that the latter was a very independent minded prelate and regarded as somewhat of a tory politically. Dr. O'Donnell, Bishop of Raphoe entertained Plunkett during a co-operative organising tour of Donegal in 1893, but the relationship appears to have declined at a later stage.¹⁷

Viewing the first three years of co-operative propagandising through the medium of the diaries, i.e. the years 1889, '90 and '91, it appears that at 4 of the public meetings recorded the clerical reaction was favourable and at 2 it was negative. Over this time period one finds about 35 references to different public meetings arranged to promote the formation of co-operative societies for farmers and/or rural labourers. (There is some degree of arbitrariness involved in determining what meetings fall into this category; I have tried to eliminate in this count references that relate to the organisation of urban

workers and also meetings of co-operative committees, or small groups of farmers that appear to be of a semi-private nature.) It seems significant that of these 35 meetings, a clerical presence, favourable or otherwise, is recorded in only 6 instances. (There is no indication of a clerical presence at the other gatherings excluded from this count.) This would appear to indicate that the dominant clerical reaction at local level was one of non-participation. Allowing for the high degree of selectivity and under-reporting involved in making diary entries it still seems difficult to blow-up our rough index of active clerical involvement - about 17%, or 11% if one includes favourable references only - to a figure which might compel an alternative interpretation. Nor was Plunkett normally indifferent in his diary entries or elsewhere to those who were present at meetings. An entry in the summer of 1891 reads: "At 10 a.m. met the conference of delegates from 15 dairy co-op. societies, and Fingall, Monteagle, Anderson, Stokes, Gibson, Cleeve, Beamish, two priests and 1 clergyman and a few others - over 60 in all". Again the number of R.C. clergy present as a proportion of the total gathering is tiny.

Moving forward in time to 1895 when a central organising body (the I.A.O.S.) was in existence one finds two prominent R.C. clergymen on its committee, Dr. O'Donnell, Bishop of Raphoe, and Fr. Finlay S.J. of whom M. Digby¹⁸ commented in her biography of Horace Plunkett: "He was one of the few Catholic clergy of high standing who from first to last gave Plunkett active support and valuable counsel".

Again concentrating on clerical participation in co-operative activity at national level an analysis of the delegates at the 1st General Conference of the Irish Co-operative Dairy and Agricultural Societies in September 1895 reveals that of 60 delegates (representing 29 societies) present, two were R.C. clergymen.¹⁹ Another rough index of clerical interest in the central organising body of the co-operative

movement may be provided by a breakdown of the annual list of voluntary financial subscribers to the I.A.O.S.²⁰ In 1895, there were 15 clergymen among the subscribers, representing 4% of the total. A decade later this number had increased to 64 or roughly 13% of the total. By 1915 the number of clergymen had declined to a mere nine, or 6% of all subscribers. These levels of clerical support are further deflated when it is considered that they also include a minority of Protestant clergymen. From this it would appear that enthusiasm for the co-operative movement as a significant national force did not rise to any great level, and this impression tends to be reinforced by a reading of the I.A.O.S. AGM debates between 1896 and 1920. As reported in the relevant annual reports these debates do not appear to have induced many clerical contributions - if one excludes the addresses of Fr. Finlay who was vice-president of the I.A.O.S. over this long period. A firm impulse to the co-operative movement, as a movement, does not appear to have been forthcoming, and this undoubtedly weakened its progress in certain directions. This contrasts with the experience of co-operative pioneers in some European countries, most notably Belgium, where the clerical response would appear to have been more wholehearted.

The picture which is emerging is one in which in the initial stages of local co-operative endeavour clerical reaction was mixed, and clerical participation not nearly so marked (either at local or national level) as former accounts suggested. In instances where evidence of non-involvement at a particular point in time exists it is not safe to conclude that this indicated indifference. It is unlikely that many individual members of the clergy did not play some role at parish level, that at the very least a sense of approval or disapproval was communicated. The involvement of the clergy in political and social affairs requires little substantiation, especially during the period immediately prior to and after the fall of Parnell.²¹

So far we have merely considered in a fairly abstract and rather incomplete way some measures of the extent and direction of clerical activity. No explanatory scheme embracing the probable determinants of such behaviour has been offered. We possess some observations but lack a theory. Why should the clergy show anything but favour to the new movement? This brings us back to our introductory comments on the nature of rural society.

Conflict of economic interests

The three social categories identified in our introduction as being of central significance, in terms of the present inquiry, were the tenant farmers, the clergy, and the traders. There is overwhelming evidence from many parts of Ireland to suggest that the last were generally opposed to co-operative developments. The early writers on co-operation in Ireland whose works have been cited, Plunkett, Smith-Gordon and Staples, Johnston are consistent on this point. So also are M. Digby,²² C.C. Riddall,²³ and Paddy the Cope.²⁴ Newspapers in the 1890s such as the Skibbereen Eagle, Wexford People, Waterford Star, Cork Constitution, and on occasions the Freeman's Journal and the Cork Examiner railed against the co-operative societies. Written communications²⁵ from 21 co-operative societies indicate that in over half of these cases opposition to local co-operative development was evident, and in some instances very bitter indeed. Twenty of these are dairy co-operatives, and it is reported that in 17 of these twenty cases later expansion into non-dairying activities induced a hostile reaction.

Viewed in the light of these experiences, the co-operative movement represented a disruptive force which exposed latent contradictions in the rural social structure. In a small community characterised by many face-to-face relationships the local clergy would have found it well nigh impossible to insulate themselves wholly from the newly emerging social tensions. The nature of their dilemma in such situations is

well summarised by Dean White, parish priest of the town of Nenagh. Having reluctantly accepted the chairmanship of a public meeting to discuss co-operation he warned his audience that his presence should not be misinterpreted as signifying approval of co-operative enterprise. Observing that most of the traders were absent from the meeting and that they were generally very uneasy regarding the movement, he defined his position as follows: "When it is made clear to me that the traders and shopkeepers have nothing to dread from the spread of this agricultural co-operative movement, I will have neither difficulty nor hesitation in giving the movement my support, but until I am satisfied on that point my position will be a neutral one". He is further quoted as saying: "Any effort that would be calculated to weaken the trade's influence and interest in towns would, I think, be very dangerous".²⁶ It is worth bearing in mind that Dean White was not an obscure cleric, but rather a prominent figure in North Munster agrarian and political circles.

In noting the emphasis placed on the traders' importance and the dangerous nature of any threat to their position one is led to explore possible relationships between the clergy and the traders. The economic sphere suggests itself as one area which might be fruitfully explored. While it is readily acknowledged that the clergy do not exist in a social vacuum and that their behaviour is modified by the network of social relationships which embrace them, the economic prerequisites of church activity are often ignored or naively assumed not to exist in such a sacred sphere. This economic dimension - the revenue needs of the R.C. Church - is certainly a relevant variable in considering clerical behaviour.

Some crude estimates of the revenue needs of the Church and the consequent burden imposed on its members have been made for the

nineteenth century.²⁷ While we have little confidence in the calculation of this burden, Larkin's pioneering work at least illustrates the incontrovertible point that Church financial demands were of a substantial order of magnitude. Given the existence of extensive belts of near-subsistence farming and the frustration of income expectations in Irish agriculture in the 1880s and the 1890s, it is most probable that the middle strata of rural society - big farmers, large and medium sized commercial interests, members of the professions - contributed much more per capita than the relatively less prosperous peasant farmers. This is especially likely in relation to items of capital expenditure, be it the provision of a stained glass window or a new church school.

In rural Ireland, then, such financial dependence on traders, shop-keepers and publicans would ensure that their interests were not lightly forgotten by the clergy. The correspondence between clergymen reproduced in Larkin's article indicates the intensity with which the clergy sought revenue; any development which endangered revenue sources is unlikely to have received an unambiguous welcome. And as we have seen commercial interests were quite vociferous in publicly denouncing the co-operative movement as a threat to "legitimate" business. It may be added, in parenthesis, that large farmers, particularly graziers, stood to gain little from co-operative organisation. No doubt these also constituted important sources of clerical funds, but the priest's dilemma was softened to the extent that conflict centering on the co-operative system impinged less directly on the interests of large farmers.

Oral testimony from a former chairman of a dairy co-operative society (situated in a medium sized village) claims that clerical opposition to his society was motivated by a desire on the part of the local clergy to protect their revenue sources among the local traders. However,

an interpretation solely in terms of a notion of sacerdos economicus is most probably an oversimplification. Teasing out motives is an extremely delicate process and the maximum that can be said is that economic factors are often important (but not necessarily dominant) in determining behaviour in situations such as this.

The most vivid description we have of clerical opposition to a co-operative enterprise is contained in Paddy Gallagher's autobiography.²⁸ Unfortunately he does not state explicitly why this was so, but priests and traders were both strongly opposed to his pioneering efforts to establish Templecrone Co-operative Society in 1906. Private communications (see appendix) from 4 other co-operative societies (situated in East Cork, Mid-Tipperary, Tipperary-Limerick border, and Co. Roscommon respectively) state that while the clergy were interested, and in some cases active in the formation of purely dairy co-operatives, expansion into retailing brought clerical opposition. Three of these communications imply that observations of opposition on this point are not limited only to the co-operative society in question. Thus one such communication reads: "The shopkeepers accepted the co-operative up to the time when the stores started and at that time in most places the parish priest was the man to show his disapproval and in nearly all cases he sided with the shopkeepers". Another reads: "... as in the last 30 or 40 years many local clergy were either directly related to or fairly closely related to retail traders, they did as a matter of ordinary personal reaction tend to work in their local community against the idea of the co-operative developing into retail trading".²⁹ This is an especially noteworthy comment in that it suggests that, on occasion, kinship ties may have played a crucial role in determining behaviour. It is, of course, also quite suggestive on the social origins of the clergy.

The Plunkett Papers³⁰ contain an interesting exchange of letters

between Horace Plunkett and the R.C. Bishop of Elphin, Dr. Clancy. Plunkett opens by commenting: "... I understand that you are letting it be known that you are opposed to the co-operative creameries which have been widely established in your diocese".³¹ Dr. Clancy replies (June 9th 1908) that he has been misinterpreted as denouncing such ventures, when in fact he denounced certain abuses associated with co-operative creameries. A long list of such abuses is then elaborated, and one is left in little doubt as to the extent of Dr. Clancy's enthusiasm for such creameries. One such defect he notes in the new system may be significant in the context of our discussion of clerical sensitivity to commercial interests.

Many of our Irish towns possessed, some few years ago, a flourishing Butter Market, and when the farmer sold his butter, he expended the money he received in purchasing food stuffs and clothing for the needs of his household. This meant a large circulation of money in our towns, and commercial interests of every kind were in flourishing condition. ... Thus the destruction of the local Butter Trade has been followed by the decay of many subsidiary forms of industry, and nothing has taken their place. ³²

Quite apart from these possible economic implications of co-operative development the political angle must be considered. Most members of the Nationalist party saw, or affected to see co-operation as yet another Tory instrument designed to smother Home Rule aspirations with kindness. Prominent nationalists like John Dillon and Michael Davitt were especially bitter in their denunciations. That some of the clergy responded to these strictures there can be little doubt. One reads of a case where the parish priest had consulted his M.P. about the I.A.O.S.,³³ and was advised to steer clear of it as its purpose, according to the M.P., was merely Plunkett's own political aggrandisement.

Under the newspaper heading (February 1896) "Vigorous Condemnation

of the Co-operative Association by the Borrisokane Nationalists" one finds co-operation denounced as a landlords' plot to extract further benefits from tenant farmers, and a protest registered against co-operative projects in the region.³⁴ The meeting is chaired by a parish priest. Indeed this is indicative of the divisions that sometimes occurred within clerical ranks under the impact of conflicting loyalties.³⁵ Within this very region, and at this time, there was a number of priests deeply involved in local co-operative societies.³⁶

Margaret Digby, Plunkett's biographer, and a member of the Plunkett Foundation team which carried out a county by county survey of agricultural co-operation in Ireland in 1930, states that her impression is that by and large the clergy were suspicious of and/or antagonistic to co-operators in the early formative years.³⁷ While this impression is not based on any systematic collection of data it cannot be easily set aside as Miss Digby had personal access to most of the leading co-operative pioneers and is arguably one of the leading living authorities on Irish and European agricultural co-operation. This reaction she feels may be explained partly in economic terms, partly in terms of certain shared characteristics between clergy and the stronger traders - relatively high status in the community, and interests which extended beyond the local and the mundane. Thus local clergymen, who incidentally were excluded by virtue of their religious badge from other high status groups in Irish society, would tend to gravitate towards elements in the local community who approximated more closely to them in terms of prestige, economic status, and world view. This accords reasonably well with our depiction of rural society. If one excludes the large farmers, the clergy and the traders were the only significant groups who might be described as possessing a cosmopolitan outlook, with formal links (either ecclesiastical or trading) extending outwards and upwards from an intensely community

orientated, parochial setting. Economic bonds between the clergy and the stronger traders are also compatible with this interpretation.

Further evidence and attempted synthesis

A smooth narrative solely in terms of the original assumption of favourable clerical reaction is clearly inadequate. Nevertheless clerical support and/or active participation in the launching of co-operative societies was an important factor in a significant number of cases. Clearly no neat synthesis is possible, but can we in some instances attempt a partial synthesis of these conflicting experiences subject to the further check that this interpretation meshes with evidence on other aspects of rural life? Let us take the case of one mid-Tipperary co-operative creamery, founded in 1908, and located in a medium sized village. Local farmers with long associations with the co-operative speak of the major role of the parish priest in establishing the society. This is confirmed by the minutes of meetings of the management committee.³⁸ However it is claimed privately that the original committee of management had to promise him that the creamery would largely confine itself to milk processing and not engage in any business activity which might bring it into competition with the village traders.³⁹ If this off-the-record assurance was given, and my personal assessment is that these informants are quite reliable, then the priest/chairman was instrumental in blocking potential developments of a controversial nature. Holding a key position on the farmers' management committee and combining with this role the further role of spiritual leader of the local community - embracing both villagers and country-folk - he was in a powerful position to determine what activities were the legitimate concern of what particular social groups. He, it would appear, legitimised co-operative activity in one direction, thus facilitating realisation of the farmers' main objective - an improved system of milk processing. In turn he protected the interests of the

village traders who were dependent in part on the sale of agricultural inputs and consumer goods and the purchase of certain agricultural outputs, but were unconcerned with milk processing. Thus a direct clash of economic interests was avoided, stress points in the social structure eased, and the integrated nature of this microcosm of Irish society reaffirmed.

It is impossible to assess how general this experience may have been. It is certainly compatible with much of our knowledge of the role of the priest in Irish society and it would show our two fundamentally diverging sets of experience in a different and less contradictory light. Without doubt the clergy entertained a general sympathy for any attempts that might appear to promote the economic prosperity of their congregations, provided there were no adverse side-effects as viewed from the vantage point of the R.C. Church.⁴⁰ Evaluating a new social movement and determining the appropriate reaction was unlikely to be a hasty process. The presence of landlord and Protestant elements in the co-operative movement and the hostility of most nationalist politicians compounded the problems posed by the natural antagonism of the traders. If the direct and indirect evidence we have adduced in favour of a re-interpretation of the clerical role is correct, then it appears, initially at least, that many of the clergy stood coldly aloof from co-operation. This in itself would prove quite an effective damper on co-operators' organising moves. A more sophisticated development however would have involved channelling co-operative enterprise, as the movement gathered momentum, along more acceptable lines, thus deflecting its socially disruptive thrust. This via media, as illustrated in the case of the Mid-Tipperary co-operative, is analogous to the strategy adopted by the clergy in the Land League agitation of roughly a decade or so earlier.⁴¹

Taking another area of rural economic life - that relating to the

labourers and their struggle to win economic concessions - the clerical mediating role between distinct socio-economic groupings is perceptible. Thus the Rev. E. M'Swiney, presiding over a monthly meeting of the Ennis-keen (Co. Cork) branch of the Democratic Labour Federation is careful to refute the suggestion of some farmers that "the labour agitation was an attack upon themselves". But nothing, he claims, could be more absurd than this, "because the labour movement was as much in favour of the farmers as the labourers".⁴² This parish priest then develops a skillful, though rather dubious argument which serves to accommodate all interests. Devising a solution to the land question and the problem of the rural labourer involves transferring the land to the tenant farmers at low prices, thus leaving the new proprietor in a sound economic position - one in which he will be able to employ rural labourers. By contributing to the tenants' agitation the labourers can bring the land struggle to a successful conclusion thus ensuring their own employment prospects within a prosperous peasant proprietary. Viewed in this light their respective struggles are complementary.

At a "monster meeting" of the representatives of the trades and labourers of Skibbereen in 1894, the priest presiding notes the growing strife between capital and labour at home and abroad.⁴³ He regrets that the "friendly relations that should exist between workmen and employer are being strained, and are beginning to snap asunder". He goes on to emphasise the necessary interdependence between capitalist and labourer and the need for mutual co-operation and good-will.

In almost identical vein, one might note the address of the Rev. Chairman to a labourers' meeting in Nenagh in December 1894.⁴⁴ The role of mediator in economic affairs is illustrated in a more active sense by Bishop Dwyer's intervention in the strike of bacon curing workers in 1890, affecting Limerick, Waterford and Cork, and in the Limerick and Waterford railworkers strike of 1891.⁴⁵ The exercise of a similar type

function by the clergy in relation to land disputes involving tenant farmers is generally recognised. This further dimension of clerical activity, as revealed by comparative analysis, enhances our understanding of the clerical conception of social organisation and the appropriate social relationships between different classes. The reality of social stratification is recognised and accepted. The ideal society is conceived as a system of interlocking, mutually interdependent parts functioning smoothly in the interests of all. Although non-egalitarian, it is essentially a harmony model of society, as opposed to, for instance, the marxist conflict model. Conflict between different socio-economic groupings, be it between farmers/co-operators and traders, or farmers and labourers represent deviations from the social ideal of a harmony of classes, or what continental clergymen knew as la paix sociale.

In the light of this ideological orientation it is hardly surprising that the priest should play an important part in the management and resolution of conflicts within rural society. His role in settling land disputes between neighbours, and agro-industrial disputes between employers and employees, his reactions to rural labourers' claims and to co-operative developments display considerable consistency. Certain forms of social conflict were to be deprecated as these introduced tensions which disturbed the stability and cohesion of Roman Catholic communities.⁴⁶ Social deviants such as co-operative pioneers had to be reintegrated into community structures if the old clerical power and authority patterns were to be maintained intact. Participation of clergy in co-operative societies would have gone a long way towards achieving this.

Evidence of joint action on the part of priests and traders in a number of instances is somewhat unexpected and suggests some interesting lines of enquiry. While interpretation of such an association is extremely tentative, considerations of social status, revenue and kinship links

suggest themselves as possible explanatory factors.

Concluding comments

From our review of the available evidence it appears that clerical reaction to the co-operative movement took three main forms. Firstly, reserve or actual opposition for a variety of motives, this being most apparent where co-operative development threatened the social equilibrium in rural communities. Reserve and suspicion are likely to have been more general in the innovative period sometimes crystallising into opposition where co-operator and trader groups adopted hostile postures vis-a-vis each other. A very different reaction, and one gaining momentum through time was that of active promotion of co-operative enterprises. The third approach, which is really a refinement of the second position involved conditional and selective promotion of such enterprises e.g. purely milk processing as opposed to multi-purpose co-operatives. Approaching the end of the first decade of co-operative propagandising, the second reaction or perhaps some refinement of it represents the dominant pattern. Instances of hostility might manifest themselves occasionally from now on, but the co-operative form of organisation had established itself as a permanent feature of rural Ireland. Clerical participation, and interest in the central organs of the co-operative movement, and by inference, in the more visionary aspects of the co-operative ideology cannot be viewed as noteworthy and would appear to have declined from a peak in the early years of this century. The publication in 1904 of Plunkett's controversial book, Ireland in the New Century cannot have helped in attracting and maintaining clerical support. The subsequent renewal of nationalist attacks on co-operation as well as a general pre-occupation with political issues and remedies after the Liberal electoral triumph of January 1906 were probably more significant factors. In view of these, one may wonder if the co-operative movement would have been even more successful in

attracting the energies of local clergymen had it assumed a somewhat sectarian character or adapted itself to the political currents of the time by transforming itself into a vehicle for nationalism. A survey of co-operation in 1931, for instance, noted in passing that priests and schoolteachers, who in other countries had provided much of the local leadership for credit societies, had not performed a comparable role in Ireland.⁴⁷ European co-operative movements, it may be noted, tended to have strong identifying characteristics of a religious or national kind (infusing them, perhaps, with the "vital heat" George Russell found so conspicuously lacking in the Irish movement).⁴⁸ It seems reasonable to conclude that in certain fundamental respects the movement in Ireland fitted less than easily into the emerging social and political patterns of pre-independence Ireland. It retained its non-political and non-denominational character, but probably only at the cost of reducing its appeal for certain non-farming groups - the Roman Catholic clergy in particular.

FOOTNOTES

1. Emmet Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment and the Roman Catholic Church in 19th Century Ireland' in American Historical Review, lxxii (1967), pp. 864-5.
2. Leo XIII: Rerum Novarum. Eng. trans. in Ehler and Morrall (eds.), Church and State through the Centuries (New York, 1967). In Europe the alliance of altar and throne precluded the R.C. Church from adopting anything but an extremely cautious, if not actually reactionary role in relation to social reform. While Social Catholicism had manifested itself in various forms and on a limited scale over the 19th century it was only in the closing decade or so of that century that it received considerable encouragement from the Papacy.
3. A.R. Vidler, A Century of Social Catholicism 1820-1920 (London, 1964) p. 127.
4. A detailed assessment of relationships between the R.C. Church, the State and the institutions of Irish nationalism is contained in D.W. Miller, Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921 (Dublin, 1973).
5. No systematic analysis of the social origins of the Irish clergy has been undertaken but the general consensus of opinion favours this interpretation. See Connell, Irish Peasant Society, (Oxford, 1968), pp. 123-6 and 148-9.
6. In a characteristic outburst, the Irish Catholic leader-writer (31 Aug. 1895) declares that the civil administration "which so long as it rejects our National demands, can only be regarded as the enemy of Ireland and of her people".
7. L. Paul-Dubois, Contemporary Ireland (Dublin and London, 1908), p. 501. Even Paul-Dubois who was distinctly sympathetic to R. Catholic aspirations could remark, (p. 481) that "in no country does the secular arm show more respect for religion, and its ministers".
8. The Irish clergy's view of the moral decadence of industrial society, especially that of England ("pagan England") is brought out in a number of books, pamphlets and statements. See, for instance, Rev. J. Guinan, The Soggarth Aroon (Dublin, 1905), p. 201, and Rev. M. O'Riordan, Catholicity and Progress (London, 1906), chapt. iv. It may be the case as one writer puts it - Schrier, Ireland and the American Emigration 1850-1900 (U.S.A., 1958) - that the R.C. clergy were less forceful than Irish nationalists in protesting against emigration, but their unease at the process, and the so-called moral dangers implicit in it are not in doubt.
9. Freeman's Journal, 1 Oct. 1900.
10. W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925), p. 103. For generally favourable comments on land redistribution by prominent clergymen see Record of the Maynooth Union 1898-99 (Dublin, 1899), pp. 31-4; Record 1899-1900, p. 40; Record 1900-01, pp. 66-7; Record 1901-2; p. 50; Record 1902-3, p. 69.
11. Rev. T.F. Macken, 'After the Land Purchase Acts', Record of the Maynooth Union 1902-3 (Dublin, 1903), p. 75.

12. It is not my intention to give the impression that the non-R.C. clergy played no part in the formation of co-operatives. Indeed they played an important role in some areas, particularly in the more northerly half of Ireland, and sometimes alongside their R.C. clerical brethren. However their overall significance in relation to co-operative development as a whole is not great.
13. Accounts of the historical development of Irish co-operation devote little space to this point which is surprising and somewhat perplexing given the importance of the priest in rural society. One looks in vain for anything more than brief comments in such works as H. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century (London, 1904); L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London, 1917); R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935). James Johnston, author of Agricultural Co-operation in Northern Ireland (London, 1965) does not refer to this point, although pressure of space may have been the chief constraint here.
14. Irish Catholic, 13 Nov. 1897, in a report on the third annual meeting of the I.A.O.S. McKevitt in his essay "Epilogue: Modern Ireland" in P.J. Corish (ed.), A History of Irish Catholicism (Dublin, 1967-71), is probably correct in claiming that a detailed interpretation by Irish churchmen of Rerum Novarum never proceeded very far. Yet it is unlikely that it failed utterly to produce some modification of the clerical world view. It could, on occasion serve as a vague source of legitimation for innovations and alterations to existing practices, as illustrated in the Irish Catholic report for instance.
15. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895, p. 4.
16. Plunkett Diaries, 1 May 1891, (Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, Oxford).
17. Plunkett Diaries, 5 April 1910.
18. M. Digby, Horace Plunkett (Oxford, 1949), p. 55.
19. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1896, appendix E.
20. I.A.O.S., Annual Reports for 1895, 1905, 1915.
21. One general instance, which has the merit of being quantitative, may suffice to illustrate this point. C.C. O'Brien estimates that the county conventions for the selection of parliamentary candidates in 1885 "consisted on average 150 laymen and 50 priests". C.C. O'Brien, Parnell and His Party 1880-90 (reprinted ed., Oxford, 1974), p. 130. While the comparison is somewhat unfair, this ratio of priests to laymen contrasts unfavourably with those we have calculated in relation to the co-operative movement.
22. Digby, Horace Plunkett.
23. C.C. Riddall, Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland (Dublin, 1950).
24. P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (revised ed., Tralee, n.d.).
25. For a description of the methods used see appendix.
26. Descriptions of this meeting appeared in the Irish Daily Independent

27 Jan. '96, the Eagle and County Cork Advertiser 1 Feb. '96, and a long account in the Cork Examiner 18 March '96. One report was aptly titled "Agricultural Co-operation on Trial in Tipperary".

27. Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the R.C. Church', A.H.R.

28. P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope, pp. 101-2.

29. This comes from the general manager of a large multi-purpose co-operative society with a trading area extending over several counties. There is a problem here in that this evidence relates to a somewhat later period in time. However, if one accepts that there is little reason to believe that rural society or its social composition was changing dramatically and that a group's position vis-a-vis another social group tends to be fairly enduring then such evidence is admissible. Certainly in the case of traders a consistent pattern (although of diminished intensity) is discernible from the early period until fairly recent times.

One might note in this context the acidic comment of Patrick D. Kenny - the priest "petted the child of the wealthy publican and ignored or intimidated the child of the poor peasant". 'Pat', Economics for Irishmen, (4th edition, Dublin, 1907), p. 148. Kenny further alleges that the clergy often opposed co-operation because it generated local lay Catholic leaders who were seen as a threat to clerical leadership in secular affairs.

30. Plunkett Papers - a short title for the Papers of Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett, (Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, Oxford).

31. Plunkett to Clancy, 2 June 1908.

32. Clancy to Plunkett, 9 June 1908. In a somewhat similar, though more antagonistic vein note the testimony of the Rev. M. Kane to the Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Sixth Report of the Commissioners, [Cd. 3747] H.C. 1908, xxxix, Q. 34860.

33. Plunkett Diaries, 9 Sept. 1897. It is also true that some clergy shared the popular notion that political reforms were preconditions for economic development. See, for example, the comments of Canon O'Mahony and Bishop Healy in the Record of the Maynooth Union 1897-8, pp. 35-7.

34. Literary Cuttings: Early History of the I.A.O.S., (Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies).

35. Such divisions could also occur sometimes between priests associated with different co-operative societies. See Plunkett Diaries, 4 June '98.

36. For example, Rev. J. Gleeson, P.P., Kyle Co-operative Credit Society, and Fr. Crowe, Ballywilliam Co-operative Dairy Society. Rev. Fathers McKeogh and Magrath were involved in efforts to establish co-operative creameries about this time. For a description of conflict between a priest co-operator and his bishop see R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), pp. 92-3. The bishop is alleged to have opposed co-operation because of his kinship ties with traders.

37. Interview with M. Digby 1973; written communication Feb. 1975.

38. These are now in the possession of the writer.
39. One informant, possibly adding a dash of colour to his narrative, claims that the parish priest "made the committee-men go down on their knees and promise not to open a store in the creamery." It is worth noting that this clerical response to co-operation is consistent with the strictures of Bishop O'Donnell a decade earlier. "It seemed to him that co-operation was in itself a sound and healthy plant... But, in the first place, it seemed to him that they had to take care to bestow upon that plant careful cultivation, so that it would not protrude its branches into the windows, or its roots under the foundations of the shops of the country... as a friend of the movement he would warn its promoters to beware of promoting throughout Ireland any general system of co-operative stores. He need not enlarge upon the reasons which would at once alienate from the movement the sympathy of the clergy if a programme of that kind were adopted..." Record of the Maynooth Union 1897-8, p. 33.
40. The various works on Roman Catholicism cited in this paper substantiate this point, as do leading articles from the Irish Catholic, and the observations of writers only incidentally concerned with religious topics. The issue of clerical involvement in economic life is considered in more detail in a later chapter.
41. One recalls that only 10 years before the founding of the first co-operative creamery Michael Davitt was setting up the Land League in Co. Mayo, in spite of strong clerical warnings of communist and socialist influences. Yet priests were later quite active in forwarding and channelling Land League agitations. Thus the fact that by 1903 or so there was considerable clerical involvement in local co-operative societies is not in itself quite so significant as might first appear. Nor is it necessary to assume a conscious strategy; a mere clerical presence on committees of management would imply certain constraints.
42. Eagle and County Cork Advertiser, 10 March '94.
43. Eagle and County Cork Advertiser, 1 Sept. '95.
44. Nenagh News, 22 Dec. '94.
45. Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 1890-'91. See also Fr. Ryder's address to the Archconfraternity (Limerick) urging conciliation in the bacon industry dispute, referred to in the issue of 7 Feb. '90.
46. While the point is not developed it is fairly obvious why these generalisations cannot be stretched to embrace the landlord element in rural society.
47. The Horace Plunkett Foundation, Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland: A Survey (London, 1931), p. 385.
48. George Russell, The Building up of a Rural Civilization (Dublin, 1910), p. 3. It is interesting to note that the Irish language movement, itself contemporaneous with the co-operative movement, evolved a radically different approach to the issues of language and nationality.

It is hardly coincidental that the language revival campaign succeeded in gaining substantial clerical backing, especially among the younger clergy.

Appendix.

Three distinct information gathering techniques were used in compiling evidence for this chapter. While the main emphasis was placed on analysis of conventional documentary sources, this was supplemented by use of the technique of oral history and by the social survey technique of postal questionnaire. A few comments on the postal questionnaires (or private communications) may be in order. Using the 1912 list of co-operative dairy societies as a sampling frame 68 societies were randomly selected. Simple questionnaires seeking information on, among other things, trader and clerical reaction to the co-operative in its formative period were distributed to each society. It was specified in each case that written communications were desired only from individuals, either co-op. staff or past or present members of the management committees, who were intimately associated with the local co-op. society and felt they possessed reliable historical information.

It is difficult to precisely assess the response rate as quite a number of these 1912 societies are no longer in business; others replied that they felt unable to provide information. In all 25 completed returns were obtained, giving a wide geographical spread, 18 of which were useful within the context of the present paper. (In some instances interesting replies were followed up with oral interviews.) It should be noted in this brief review of procedure that the emphasis is on treating and presenting evidence supplied by private respondents as historical source material which must be subjected to the historian's checks. No broad social survey type claims are made, or intended.

CHAPTER 6

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Interaction between the religious and the economic spheres has long excited the interest of historians and sociologists. The modern form of the debate is most notably linked to the works of Weber and Tawney.¹ It is not often appreciated, however, that Ireland, a land pulsating with religious energies, produced contributions which in part anticipate these modern masters. The most famous exchange is that between the reforming unionist, Sir Horace Plunkett, and the Roman Catholic writer, the Reverend M. O'Riordan.² Plunkett acquired his considerable experience of economic conditions in Ireland through his work as a member of the Congested Districts Board, as an active propagandist for rural co-operatives, and as first vice-president of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. Noting a lack of economic progress in Ireland and the differential rates of economic growth between Protestant and Catholic nations, he criticised in firm though disinterested terms some implications of the Catholic religion for economic life.³

Roman Catholicism strikes an outsider as being in some of its tendencies non-economic, if not actually anti-economic... I am simply adverting to what has appeared to me, in the course of my experience in Ireland, to be a defect in the industrial character of Roman Catholics which, however caused, seems to me to have been intensified by their religion. The reliance of that religion on authority, its repression of individuality, and its complete shifting of what I may call the moral centre of gravity to a future existence - to mention no other characteristics - appear to me calculated, unless supplemented by other influences, to check the growth of the qualities of initiative and self-reliance, especially amongst a people whose lack of education unfits them for resisting the influence of what may present itself to such minds as a kind of fatalism with resignation as its paramount virtue.

Needless to say, Plunkett's strictures drew the full wrath of a church hyper sensitive to critical comment. Soon after its appearance Ireland in the New Century was accorded the distinction of a

special pastoral denunciation by the archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Logue.⁴ The Reverend M. O'Riordan reviewed it unfavourably in the Dublin paper the Leader for a year, his literary exertions later emerging in book form as Catholicity and Progress in Ireland. Plunkett commented with a touch of humour that "a review is usually a chapter about a book" but in this case it "assumes the proportions of a book about a chapter".⁵ In his lengthy and sometimes testy rejoinder O'Riordan reiterates the traditional nationalist interpretation of the sources of Ireland's economic ills - unfavourable legislation by an alien parliament, deliberate suppression of native industries, and tenurial insecurity and rack-renting in agriculture. (These nationalist assertions embodied more political than economic logic. Recent research into Irish history has largely dislodged the cruder traditional orthodoxies).⁶

Despite the importance of the issue a comparative quiet had settled over debate on the relevance of religion as an explanatory variable for Irish underdevelopment - that is until Emmet Larkin ventured a modern contribution.⁷ The latter's approach to this sensitive topic is bold, sometimes brilliant. The orientation is especially interesting in that it focuses on the Irish Church as a complex of economic institutions, absorbing and deploying economic resources. By contrast Weber, Tawney, and Plunkett concentrated on moral and psychological variables, and the resulting character structure associated with membership of a particular religious group.⁸ While analytically distinct the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and in his concluding comments Professor Larkin briefly mentions some of the extra-economic variables. In constructing his case Professor Larkin places special weight on a set of pioneering calculations which suggest that in the second half of the nineteenth century the Irish Church absorbed almost 15 per cent of the surplus

available over subsistence for the Catholic population.⁹ While credit should be accorded for this early foray into quantification, the extremely crude nature of the calculations must be recognised. The income estimates are of a very approximate nature, being derived under rather heroic assumptions from the British national income estimates provided by Deane and Cole¹⁰ (while the further assumption that the Catholic proportion of national income remained roughly constant during the nineteenth century is highly controversial to say the very least). A spot check on these estimates is possible by contrasting Larkin's estimate of agricultural income in 1901 with the official calculation of income from Irish agricultural output in 1908. The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) arrived at a level of £46 millions for 1908 while Larkin suggests the much lower level of £31 millions for 1901, or less than a decade earlier. (The methods used by the department in collecting its information are not above criticism - these methods and a detailed breakdown of the quantities and values of the various components of agricultural output are contained in a pamphlet issued by the department in 1912¹¹ - but certainly they command much more authority than guess-estimates based on British data). Having noted the large discrepancy between the two estimates, that of the department being some 50% higher than Larkin's, it should be added that the gap cannot be appreciably closed by appeal to rapid growth in agricultural incomes over the short interval between 1901 and 1908. In fact the volume of agricultural output showed little change while most product prices registered only a gradual increase. Thus agricultural incomes can only have experienced modest growth in this interval. Even more important, perhaps, than casting doubt on this pioneering set of figures for Irish national

and agricultural incomes is consideration of the basic methodology employed. Developing such aggregates from the rather arbitrary partitioning of British totals, while ingenious, would seem to be a rather barren exercise as our spot check and Professor Cullen's more elaborate calculation suggest. This is particularly unacceptable for the turn of the century when an alternative approach - at once sounder and more obvious - is available. It is possible to exploit the data on quantities and values of industrial and other production unearthed by the 1907 census of production (allied to the 1908 agricultural census) as a basis for some approximate calculations of national and sectoral incomes around 1900. It becomes more difficult to apply this procedure as one moves backwards in time through the nineteenth century, but for agriculture for instance there are extensive data on output and prices back to the middle of that century. Estimates of output and prices for some other industries are also possible. Without attempting to minimise the difficulties or the data scarcity, it may be suggested that solid progress in illuminating the major areas of statistical darkness in Irish history will depend on work along these lines. By comparison, refining conjectures based on what are rough estimates of national and sectoral incomes for the neighbouring island appears less than fruitful.

Because one can place little, if any, confidence in either the method underlying Larkin's calculations or the actual results, it might even be suggested that the contribution be dismissed ab initio or else judgement suspended until more reliable estimates become available. Such responses, however, are unhelpful. The degree of error associated with Larkin's calculations is a subsidiary issue. Given the striking progress of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth

century its revenue needs must have been considerable, even if, as seems probable, the burden has been exaggerated. So casting doubt on a particular set of estimates is merely to clear the way for a fresh crop. It does not necessarily undermine the logical structure and hence the partial validity of this particular approach. A more general refutation is required.

The core of the Larkin thesis is the contention that the Irish Church, in siphoning off a large proportion of the nation's potential savings and committing these to unproductive enterprise, inhibited economic development. It is certainly true that the Church's acquisition and use of economic resources had an opportunity cost in terms of benefits foregone in not producing different outputs. Such different outputs might have extended from consumer goods only at one extreme through various combinations of producer and consumer goods to producer goods only at the other extreme of the production possibility frontier. Maximising economic growth opportunities would have involved concentration on the latter end of the range. In the short term it is also possible to envisage a situation in which, in the absence of the Church, total expenditure in the economy would have been at a higher level than was historically the case. Such a shift in aggregate demand, if realised, could have a cumulative result, initial spending impulses giving rise to additional income effects in the economy at large.

To sustain the argument that the Church's expenditure programmes strongly depressed national income the following proposition must be established: in the absence of such claims on resources conditions favourable to productive investment in Ireland would have obtained. Funds released would fructify in native enterprises. In relation to

the shorter term possibility raised above, if this is to possess any weight, then one needs to show that increased effective demand would have a strong multiplier effect on other sectors of the economy. However, in the case as presented by Larkin there is a crucial rupture in the logical structure; the very conditions that need to be demonstrated are implicitly assumed. Despite this it may be that Larkin, while overlooking essential elements in the exposition, has nonetheless arrived at a historically plausible set of conclusions. How probable is the counterfactual scenario, necessarily implied by his argument?¹² Taking the investment conditions first there is no reason to believe that a shortage of capital at the aggregate level was a serious growth constraint. One useful indicator of the expansion of the savings base of the economy is the development of banking services between 1851 and 1891. In 1851 there was, on average, only one banking office for every 37,600 persons; by 1881 this ratio had improved to one office per 10,700 persons. The year 1891 saw further sustained improvement as a ratio of one office per 8,200 persons was achieved.¹³ A more precise indicator is the level of deposits in the main savings institutions. This evidence is summarised in Table I. It is clear from this that the savings capacity of the nation was quite substantial, and that savings maintained a strong upward movement over the half century, although as is to be expected, there is a slackening during the period that roughly approximates that of the Agricultural Depression.

TABLE I

(i) Deposits in Post Office Savings Banks, Trustee Savings Banks, and Joint Stock Banks in Ireland 1840-1910 (in millions of pounds)^a

	Post Office Savings Banks ^b	Trustee Savings Banks	Joint Stock Banks
	£	£	£
1840		2.2	5.6
1850		1.3	8.3
1860		2.1	15.6
1870	0.6	2.1	24.4
1880	1.6	2.1	30.0
1890	3.7	2.0	33.3
1900	8.1	2.3	43.3
1910	12.0	2.5	55.0

a Derived from the Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (BPP, 1914, XIII), pp. 21, 39.

b First established 1861.

(ii) Total Deposits in the three Savings Institutions (in millions of pounds) and Decennial Changes by Percentages.

	£	%
1840	7.8	
1850	9.6	+23
1860	17.7	+84
1870	27.1	+53
1880	33.7	+24
1890	39.0	+16
1900	53.7	+38
1910	69.5	+29

In rural Ireland capital shortage does not appear to have constituted a severe constraint on agricultural development. The rapid expansion of livestock numbers during and after the Great Famine as market conditions favoured such investment furnishes a strong contrary pointer. The total cattle population, representing the largest single item of capital expenditure on Irish farms, increased from 1.84 millions in 1841 to just under 3 millions in 1851. This investment continued throughout the century, although not at such remarkable speed, a figure of 4.7 millions being reached in 1901.¹⁴ In the final decade of the century when processing in the dairying industry was being organised along factory lines, the rural community contributed to these developments. Thus if one examines the farmer controlled co-operative creamery movement one finds that from a humble beginning of one co-operative creamery in 1889, fifteen years later over 200 creameries had been built with a combined share capital in excess of £100,000.¹⁵ Lack of profitable investment opportunities, the level of entrepreneurial skills, and unfavourable demographic trends would seem to be far more significant restraints on the progress of Irish agriculture in the post-famine period.¹⁶ Somewhat different considerations apply to the areas outside the commercial farming districts. On the tiny and mainly impoverished holdings in the west of Ireland the abolition of rent, not to mention church dues would have made little difference to the material welfare of the people.¹⁷ The major investment opportunity lay in outward mobility, a course thousands adopted annually, both as permanent emigrants and as migratory labourers. Detailed evidence on rents, church dues and other forms of expenditure are available for 84 western districts stretching from Donegal, through Connaught, onto west Cork, and these demonstrate conclusively that neither church dues nor rents were important determinants of poverty in these depressed areas.¹⁸ The simple truth was

that, given the slender economic resources of these areas and the disproportionately large population, only massive labour flows from these regions could effect a substantial rise in the standard of living of those who might remain. Regarding the possible lack of capital through diminished savings for rural industries, it is difficult to dissent from the following conclusion: "There are ample funds on deposit in the Irish Joint Stock Banks for the development of rural industries, if means were only found of creating an industrial atmosphere, and attracting to an increased extent the confidence of the investor and of the Banks."¹⁹ Through the economy as a whole risk aversion rather than capital shortage emerges as the more important feature of investment behaviour. An interesting illustration of this was the reluctance of Irish investors to commit their capital to Irish railway ventures until an inflow of English capital had first reassured them of the profit possibilities.²⁰

An examination of Larkin's own evidence on important church revenue sources - charitable bequests and legacies - sharpens one's doubts that much of this wealth, even if urgently required, would have found its way into productive activity in Ireland.²¹ Religiously inclined old ladies, and other pious members of the laity, as well as some clergy, are not the most obvious sources of risk capital. In the absence of institutions (banking, industrial and agricultural development agencies) specifically geared to native development, and given the lack of control of capital movements between different regions of the United Kingdom economy, it is highly improbable that the funds abstracted by the Church were deflected from fulfilling a major investment role. The net outflow of money capital from Ireland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century removes any lingering doubt that availability of capital represented a serious limit on growth.²²

What of the further, less significant possibility that the revenue extracted might have been expended on certain goods and services, the effect of which would have been to stimulate other sectors of the economy? A subsidiary point may be made first. The farflung Irish networks in Australia and America were a useful source of funds, as both Larkin and O'Riordan mention. Thus lay purchasing power was not automatically depressed to the extent that Church receipts initially suggest.²³ More important though one must locate the probable outlets for increased lay purchasing power in a situation where the laity have been released from their financial obligations to the Church. Even under the favourable assumption that effective demand would be increased as a result of the change in expenditure patterns the argument carries little weight. For a strong impact on the rest of the economy spending should be concentrated on commodities produced within Ireland with a low, preferably zero import component embodied in them. In addition the tendency to consume additional units of income should be high. In other words leakages from the economy - in the form of a high level of savings transmitted abroad rather than used in Ireland, or in the form of spending on imports - should not be especially marked. We have already noted that the first of these provisos is violated by historical experience. Savings levels were high and because of the nature of existing financial institutions tended to be conveyed from a peripheral region such as Ireland into the heart of the United Kingdom economy. In relation to the second it is known that a high propensity to import was a feature of Irish trade,²⁴ thus further dampening the wider impact of any initial stimulus. Indeed, in view of these two considerations, it is possible to advance a diametrically opposed line of argument. The Church was itself a major consumer of goods and services. It had strong linkages to enterprises in the local economic

context. By raising the level of domestic demand for such services as building and maintenance services, as well as requiring steady supplies of food and food products - outputs which, on the whole, could only be provided by native industries - it is probable that the Church contributed to economic growth rather than the reverse. A further point in relation to spending patterns may be added. The calculation that the funding of Church activity absorbed almost 15% of the income surplus has no special economic significance; unless it can be shown that the associated pattern of expenditure has a definitely anti-growth character it is little more than an interesting artefact.²⁵ One might just as meaningfully calculate a similar type ratio for other forms of consumer spending, such as drink consumption for instance, and claim that this implied a wasteful deployment of resources from the viewpoint of economic growth.²⁶ Such exercises are more immediately relevant to value loaded interpretations of the composition of national output rather than the issue of growth as such.

We have considered the implications of the Church's claims on physical resources; to fully round off this treatment it is necessary to explore the probable implications of its claims on human resources. It has been suggested that the absorption by the Church of a large body of entrepreneurial talent had further serious consequences for economic growth.²⁷ While this point may possess some validity it must be firmly recognised that a clerical career was but one of a number of attractive outlets opening up to the Catholic urban and rural middle classes. The pressure for places in such professions as law and medicine seems to indicate that a block to social mobility in the

ecclesiastical sphere would merely have increased pressure at other outlets which are not immediately associated with economic enterprise.²⁸ One traveller in Ireland claimed that the substantial Ulster peasant always tried to make one of his sons a lawyer.²⁹ R.A. Anderson, who had an intimate knowledge of Irish society through his work as an organiser of co-operatives, is incidentally quite revealing on the social aspirations of tenant farmers. Complimenting a particular land-agent on his ability to placate the most troublesome tenants and to extract arrears of rent, Anderson quotes the land-agent's skilful use of flattery:³⁰

"Sure Lord C. must get his rent; the poor man, you know, isn't too well off and spends every penny of it at home. And, tell me, how is Mikey getting on at school - mind you, he is more like his mother than his father, a fine healthy boy. What'll you make of him, Mrs. Murphy? May be a Priest or a Doctor?" The good woman's rage would have been subdued by this soft talk and she'd murmur that she had no such great ambitions for her offspring but pleaded only that they might feel secure in their possession of the 'little farm of land'.

The point that mainly interests us here is, of course, the form that such "great ambitions" took. As career preferences within social groupings tend to be relatively enduring, it is hardly a plausible counterfactual proposition to suggest that, had the convents and seminaries not existed, there would have been a significant re-direction of youthful talent. Nor should it be assumed that the clerical role ruled out the possibility of assuming some entrepreneurial functions. When the socio-political environment favoured more constructive forms of collective economic activity in the last decade of the nineteenth century, many Catholic (and Protestant) clergy became directly involved. In the depressed regions in the west of Ireland local clergy were active in supporting and supplementing improvements initiated by the Congested Districts Board. The first secretary and later historian of that body, W.L. Micks was especially enthusiastic

about the economic role of the clergy and in his tribute to their enterprise he incorporates a lengthy roll call of clerical activists.³¹ In other areas clergy participated on newly formed county committees of agriculture (set up in the wake of the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1900).³² The numbers of informed clerical witnesses giving evidence on social and economic conditions to governmental enquiries are also indicative of a constructive clerical contribution. We have already noted Horace Plunkett's comment in 1904 that of the societies organised by the I.A.O.S., more than 300 of these had local priests as chairmen.³³ He also pays tribute to the activities of the R.C. clergy in conducting large numbers of farmers over the exhibit of the Department of Agriculture at the Cork Exhibition of 1902. We are also aware though that not all priests gave an unambiguous welcome to co-operative organisation. However, once the movement had gathered momentum the response of the clergy to local economic projects such as creameries or credit societies (but not retail societies) was distinctly favourable. Obviously one can be over naive in conducting a mere head count of clerical involvement in various economic activities. The quality of the contribution, and the suspicion that the indiscriminate accumulation of power may have motivated some should not be overlooked. Yet it would be too cynical to dismiss the bulk of this activity on such grounds.

If the allegedly negative impact of the Church cannot be traced along such specific channels as its use of resources, perhaps, as Plunkett claimed, its inhibiting potential inheres in its doctrinal corpus. Thus attitudes and values unfavourable to economic enterprise may be transferred and internalised in the process of religious socialisation. This shifts the critical perspective towards the angle

favoured by Weber and Tawney.³⁴ The problem with this approach is almost wholly methodological; it is easy to forward plausible hypotheses of this nature, but extremely difficult to test them.³⁵ The ongoing debate on the relationship between the Protestant Ethic and the emergence of Capitalism testifies to this difficulty. And as has been pointed out, a high degree of correlation between these two variables is open to a number of different and competing explanations.³⁶ One certainly cannot presume to offer a definitive statement in the Irish case, but the admittedly limited data available is not especially favourable to the classic sociological view. In the eighteenth century, despite legal and other limitations on Catholic enterprise, substantial numbers of Catholic entrepreneurs emerged, and indeed as that century closed Ireland had a reasonable claim to be considered a relatively developed country by European (but not English) standards.³⁷ Unless the economic implications of Catholic doctrine changed radically in subsequent decades it is difficult to dismiss this sustained development as some kind of temporary aberration. A possible counter argument to this may be briefly noted. It is the case that the Irish Church gained a much firmer grip of its followers in the nineteenth century as its teachings were propagated in a more intensive and systematic manner.³⁸ Perhaps then Catholic norms, while not necessarily changing, were being taken more seriously by the mass of the people? As against this one must acknowledge that in the crucial post-Famine period the growth of piety was paralleled by a growing consumer consciousness, rising material expectations, and a ruthless commitment to land possession almost irrespective of the human costs imposed. Pious peasant and economic man merged easily into each other. This suggests the relative autonomy of the religious and the economic spheres, spill-over from the one to the other being limited. However, one Catholic norm - the absolute prohibition on forms of family limitation -

might be more plausibly linked to a low level of material welfare in Ireland. The remarkably large families, stemming from what Dr. Kelly, Bishop of Ross, liked to call the "exceptional purity of morals of the Irish people" within marriage,³⁹ might be seen as increasing the economically dependent proportion of the population and as straining the productive resources of the country. Some development economists have focused attention on these adverse demographic consequences; a leading practitioner has warned that "certain religious attitudes are opposed to deliberate family limitation and may result in overpopulation, famine and poverty."⁴⁰ The simple answer to this in the Irish case is, of course, that the people of nineteenth-century Ireland possessed neither the desire nor the techniques to practise family limitation. The Church, on this issue, led the Catholic population in the direction in which it was inclined to go in any case.

Turning aside from Catholic to Protestant groups in Ireland it must be admitted that in the nineteenth century militant Protestantism and industrial progress appeared to be closely related in the north-eastern enclave which centered on Belfast, while the Irish economy as a whole went into secular decline. However, it is remarkable that some of the leading Ulster entrepreneurs of that century did not spring from the predominantly Protestant society of the north-east. Thus the "father of Belfast shipbuilding", William Ritchie was of Scottish origin, while two giants of that industry, G.W. Wolff and Edward Harland were also of non-Ulster stock.⁴¹ More generally, the great contribution of immigrant groups - Huguenots, Quakers, Scots - to the development of the north-east must be recognised.⁴² Clearly in the absence of a representative set of entrepreneurial biographies one can only form some crude impressions, but for the proponents of the classic view there are some substantial problems to be explained away.⁴³

To conclude: the purely economic functioning of the Irish Church represents an improbable line of argument in explaining the poor performance of the Irish economy in the nineteenth century. The implications of Church revenue and expenditure patterns suggest, if anything, some impulse towards economic growth rather than retardation. Rather than seeking such a causal connection between the Church and the economy, it may indeed be more realistic, particularly in relation to rural Ireland, to view the people's spending on metaphysical services as but one reflection of more deep seated elements in the social structure inimical to economic development. Local clerical participation in economic activities, at worst, emerges in a weakly positive light. That it does not assume a considerably stronger aura is in part due to its selectivity. Clerical activity of an economic nature is almost wholly concerned with rural economic development, and is indicative of a stream of agrarianism running through clerical thinking. This mood is conveyed by the Reverend T.A. Finlay, Jesuit priest and professor of political economy at University College, Dublin.⁴¹ "He believed it would be a sad day for this country if the multiplication of Belfasts should obscure the great truth that it was not in the manufactures, but in the fields of the country, that the real prosperity of the nation was to be sought." There is no evidence however that these preferences materially influenced entrepreneurial decisions in the nineteenth century. In the typical case one presumes the businessman is sensitive to private rather than social costs and benefits. So while members of the clergy might be uneasy about the social consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation one would be very surprised indeed to find profit-motivated individuals neglecting investment opportunities on this basis. On a more nebulous though perhaps fundamental plane, it is difficult to assess the significance of

Catholic doctrine and associated norms for the supply of entrepreneurship. However in the absence of a convincing demonstration along these lines it seems more reasonable to regard the Catholic Church as making a positive, if modest contribution to the economy of nineteenth century Ireland.

FOOTNOTES

1. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London, 1930); R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (London, 1929).
2. Horace Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century (London, 1904) ch. 4; Reverend M. O'Riordan, Catholicity and Progress in Ireland (4th ed.; London, 1906). A further, less well developed and largely hostile contribution on the role of the Catholic religion in Irish economic life is Patrick Kenny, Economics for Irishmen (4th ed., Dublin, 1907), ch. 13. In a similar polemical vein one might note the lecture of the Reverend J.E. Moffatt to the Dublin Grand Orange Lodge, as reported in the Irish Times 3 June 1910. Predictably differential economic growth as between Protestant and Catholic nations is explained in terms of differences in religious principles. A consciousness of these issues is also apparent in the pamphlet literature; note for instance F.M. Jennings (Member of the Royal Irish Academy), The Present and Future of Ireland as the Cattle Farm of England and her Probable Population (2nd ed., Dublin, 1865), 8 and An Irishman, Religion versus Commerce (Ireland without a Chance) (London, 1886).
3. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, pp. 101-2.
4. See Freeman's Journal 7 March 1904. See also diary entry by Plunkett on the 7 March 1904 in which he suggests that Cardinal Logue had not actually read the book, but appeared to have based his comments solely on an earlier critical letter, from a clergyman, in the Freeman's Journal.
5. This occurs in an epilogue to a cheap edition of Plunkett's book, published in 1905.
6. Only a few major revisionist texts may be cited here: L.M. Cullen (ed.), The Formation of the Irish Economy (Cork, 1969); L.M. Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660 (London, 1972); Barbara Solow, The Land Question and the Irish Economy 1870-1903 (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).
7. Emmet Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', American Historical Review, LXXII (1967), 852-84.
8. In terms of this emphasis on the importance of an industrial character Plunkett was influenced in part by the eminent historian Lecky. Note Horace Plunkett, Plain Talks to Irish Farmers (Dublin, 1910), p. 44 where he refers directly to Lecky, and W.E.H. Lecky, History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (reissue, London, 1916), pp. 504-5, 516. Although it was for him a sub-theme, Plunkett did in fact comment on the functioning of the Irish Church as a specifically economic institution. To this extent his discussion may be said to span both approaches. "Excessive and extravagant church-building in the heart and at the expense of poor communities is a recent and notorious example of ... misdirected zeal." Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, 107.

9. Larkin, Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland, 874. Larkin (page 874) believes the retarding influence of the Irish Church was most pronounced in the second half of the nineteenth century. Plunkett's view on timing is roughly similar - Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, pp. 104-5. If it can be shown that this is an untenable position then the case for a negative relationship between the Church and the economy in earlier periods is greatly weakened.
10. P. Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth 1688-1959 (Cambridge, 1962). Recently Professor L.M. Cullen (private communication May 1976), on the basis of much firmer calculations, has suggested the figure of £150 millions for the level of Irish national income in 1911. This is in sharp contrast with Larkin's estimate of £82 millions for 1901, and implies that the Church burden has been greatly overstated.
11. Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, The Agricultural Output of Ireland 1908 (Dublin, 1912).
12. The enquiry must be conducted in probability terms since no one can speak with certainty on what would have happened in the absence of some historical phenomenon; one can only form judgments of relative probabilities among competing possibilities.
13. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (BPP, 1914, XIII), p. 19. A perceptive contemporary discussion of capital availability is that by the Irish economist W. Neilson Hancock in his Report on the Supposed Progressive Decline of Irish Prosperity (Dublin, 1863). Hancock drew attention to increased investment in railways, large holdings of Government Stock in Irish hands, and increased deposits in joint-stock banks. Note also Hancock, 'Is there really a want of capital in Ireland?', Transactions of the Dublin Statistical Society, vol. 2, (3rd and 4th sessions, 1849-51). For a brief account of Hancock's career see R.D.C. Black, The Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland: Centenary Volume 1847-1947 (Dublin, 1947), pp. 57-65.
14. Raymond D. Crotty, Irish Agricultural Production (Cork, 1966), appendix table 3, p. 354.
15. Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, Annual Report 1905 (Dublin).
16. Possibly the most important factor of all inhibiting agricultural development was the poorly functioning land market. See Barbara L. Solow, The Land Question and the Irish Economy, 1870-1903 (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). An important early discussion of the economic implications of demographic trends in Irish farming is Crotty, Irish Agricultural Production, ch. 4.
17. 'With respect to the very small holders in the western districts of Ireland we are satisfied that with the slightest failure of their crops they would be unable to exist upon the produce of their farms, even if they paid no rent'. Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interest (BPP, 1881, XV), p. 7. More than 20 years later seven out of every eight holdings, in those areas of the west officially designated as congested, were considered uneconomic. Royal Commission on Congestion in

Ireland: Final Report (BPP, 1908, XLII), p. 744.

18. Congested Districts Board of Ireland, Inspectors' Local Reports 1892-8 (Dublin, 1898). This source indicates that incomes were so low and so precarious that remission of rents or church dues would have had only a marginal effect. Thus for the "Rosses" district of Donegal, for instance, in 1892 the average family income was said to be as little as £43 per annum, while rent and church dues combined represented less than 6% of that figure. (Figures for church dues are given for most but not all of the districts).
19. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), p. 333. One may, of course, doubt the existence of substantial profit opportunities.
20. Joseph Lee, 'The Railways in the Irish Economy' in Cullen (ed.), Formation of the Irish Economy.
21. Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', pp. 862-8.
22. The major capital outflow is dated from the 1870s or 1880s - Cullen, Economic History of Ireland, p. 169. It is true, but in a rather different sense, that lack of capital was responsible for poor economic progress. To the extent that large amounts of physical capital were not combined with labour, total output and output per head in Ireland remained low. By contrast, an early industrialising power such as England made rapid economic advances, not because it also had an investable surplus, but because this was translated into capital structures. In the latter sense capital availability is at the centre of any explanation of modern economic growth or its retardation.
23. Larkin, p. 864; O'Riordan, Catholicity and Progress, p. 30.
24. Cullen, Economic History of Ireland, p. 169.
25. To the reader who is unfamiliar with the original paper this may convey an unfair impression of what is a many-sided and valuable contribution. In this and other penetrating studies of the interaction between Church and society Professor Larkin expands the terms of debate, thus opening up a range of challenging research avenues. A wider point in relation to Irish historiography may be appropriate. The timidity of Irish historians in approaching the social and political history of the Irish Catholic Church is noteworthy. Thus reading even such a standard work as that of F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (London, 1971), one might be forgiven for thinking that the Church was of peripheral rather than central significance to Irish society. Given this circumspection it is perhaps inevitable that major contributions on the role of the Church in the nation's history should tend to come from non-Irish scholars.
26. O'Riordan, for instance, in rejecting the charge of excessive Church expenditure, claimed that the burden occasioned by the national drink bill - about £13 millions per annum when he wrote - was more worthy of critical attention. (Presumably there were

further differing notions of national waste among other contemporaries!) O'Riordan, Catholicity and Progress, p. 30.

27. Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 875.
28. Joseph Lee comments that much of higher education was irrelevant to the economic needs of the country in the nineteenth century, so for example, while there was "a serious shortage of veterinary surgeons, the Four Courts swarmed with briefless barristers." Joseph Lee, 'Capital in the Irish Economy', in Cullen (ed.), Formation of the Irish Economy, Plunkett complained that the educational system did not serve the needs of a developing economy but, in line with parental aspirations, was geared rather to the "multiplication of clerks and professional men". Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, p. 265.
29. A Guardian of the Poor (Anon.), The Irish Peasant (A Sociological Study) (Dublin, 1892), p. 53. That the status associated with an occupation was an important consideration - and what occupations had higher status than the traditional professions associated with law, medicine and religion? - is recalled by the Reverend J. Guinan in his autobiographical sketches of clerical work in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Reverend J. Guinan, The Soggarth Aroon (6th ed., Dublin, 1941), pp. 199-200. That careers in agriculture were considered unattractive by many of the young and ambitious is indicated by the Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), p. 79. Similarly note Rev. P.J. Dowling, 'Technical Education and its Points of Contact with the Work of a Priest', Record of the Maynooth Union 1900-1 (Dublin, 1901), 21 and also The Irish Peasant 10 March 1906.
30. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), 277.
31. W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925), ch. 20.
32. Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland): Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry (BPP, 1907, XVII) p. 839. This report also comments favourably on the work of bishops Kelly and Clancy in the field of agricultural education. It may also be noted that of the eight members elected to the Irish Board of Agriculture in 1912, three are clergymen, two of whom are bishops. Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, Journal, XII (1912), p. 651.
33. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century, p. 119.
34. Professor Larkin concludes by making a glancing reference to some of these issues, but as the points are not developed it is impossible to evaluate their merit. Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', 875.
35. A methodological innovation which promises to introduce more precision into this debate is the psychometric technique used by D.C. McClelland in his world wide survey of the psychological determinants of economic progress. D.C. McClelland, The Achieving Society

(Princeton, N.J., 1961).

36. Charles M. Elliott, 'The Ideology of Economic Growth: a Case Study' in E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay (eds.), Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1967).
37. Maureen Wall, 'Catholics in Economic Life' in Cullen (ed.) Formation of the Irish Economy.
38. David W. Miller, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine', Journal of Social History, IX (Sept. 1975), 81-98; Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75', AHR, LXXVII (1972), 625-52; Larkin, 'Church, State, and Nation in Modern Ireland', AHR, LXXX (1975), 1244-1276.
39. Record of the Maynooth Union 1903-4 (Dublin, 1904), p. 22.
40. W.A. Lewis, The Theory of Economic Growth (London, 1955), p. 102.
41. F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the Famine, pp. 65-6.
42. E.R.R. Green, 'Business Organisation and the Business Class' in T.W. Moody and J.C. Beckett (eds.) Ulster Since 1800: A Social Survey (London, 1957), p. 116.
43. Apart from the contrary pointers raised in the text, there is the further issue that immigrant and religious status, as in the case of Huguenots, Quakers, and Scots, frequently coincided. Disentangling the separate implications of these two factors for entrepreneurial behaviour is no easy task. There can be little doubt, though, that members of Nonconformist groups were disproportionately represented among industrial and commercial entrepreneurs in Ireland, but my own view is that thorough research will suggest that access to special skills, group cohesion and other social characteristics of minority groups, as well as immigrant status in some instances, constitute the major explanatory variables. A belated recognition, perhaps, of religion in its place - even in Northern Ireland.
44. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1908 (Dublin) pp. 62-3. The best discussion of this aspect of clerical thought is by David W. Miller in Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921 (Dublin, 1973), ch. 3. Note also Rev. J. O'Donovan, 'Priests and Industrial Development in Ireland', Record of the Maynooth Union 1899-1900 (Dublin, 1900), 39-45 and Rev. T.F. Macken, 'After the Land Purchase Acts', Record of the Maynooth Union 1902-3 (Dublin, 1903), pp. 73-5.

N.B. Since writing this chapter I have been informed through the offices of the American Historical Review, that a reprint of Professor Larkin's three AHR articles on Irish Catholicism has recently been published as The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism (New York, 1976). I have not had the pleasure of consulting this work (at the time of writing it is not, as yet, available on this side of the Atlantic) but I am further informed that Professor Larkin, in the course of an introduction to these reprints, has substantially modified his earlier views on church and economy.

Chapter 7

FARMING INTERESTS, TRADERS, AND POLITICAL POWER

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century political institutions were being recast in a form that brought them into a more sensitive relationship with the body of popular political feeling. The Ballot Act of 1872, while not initiating major political trends, at least lowered the cost of exercising voting rights in accordance with one's own preferences rather than those of the landlord or the priest.¹ As a result of the extension of the franchise in 1884, smaller property holders and labourers were involved for the first time in the process of returning members of parliament. Previously such elements were only allowed to register an impact on the political system by the use of considerably sturdier instruments than paper slips.² With the fusion of parliamentary and agrarian struggles after 1879, a strong countrywide organisational base was grafted onto the structure of parliamentary representation in nationalist Ireland. Such a broadening of the political pyramid necessarily implied the services of an increased number of political figures at local level. The turn of the century saw a further diffusion of power through the Irish countryside as popular local government, county committees of agriculture and other administrative innovations were introduced. Thus, in an era of democratic reform when political opportunities were being opened up on a broad front, the issue of how the chief beneficiaries of these reforms responded assumes major significance. Did the middle and lower strata of Irish society - rural and town labourers, tenant farmers, traders/small businessmen - now come to enjoy political representation and power in rough proportion to their electoral strength? If not, can we go some way towards explaining deviations from this hypothesised norm? In the context of a radically changed political framework, is any light shed on relative levels of

politicisation as between identifiable socio-economic categories within the nationalist community?

A comprehensive treatment of these and related issues is not attempted here. Such an undertaking, given the underdeveloped nature of this area of Irish historiography, would require a major research commitment. What is attempted is a more limited exploration, focusing in particular on rural Ireland and the exercise of political power by traders and farmers.

TRADERS AND POLITICAL POWER

A reasonably firm starting point is the set of calculations by Professor Chubb which indicates that shopkeepers, publicans and other (mainly small) businessmen were strongly overrepresented, relative to their numerical significance in the population, in the cabinets of the various Irish governments over the period 1922-1965.³ In fact they had succeeded in filling 20% of all cabinet posts since the inception of the State.⁴ Similarly an analysis of the socio-economic status of a wider sample of politically active persons - public representatives at county, county borough, and parliamentary level in the mid 1960s - is also in line with these findings. Interestingly, farmers emerge as being underrepresented in political life, despite the strongly rural character of the country. For instance, they held just under 8% of ministerial posts in the first half century of independent rule.

Can these results be extrapolated from 1922 backwards in time, thus indicating a continuity of experience between pre- and post-independence periods? O'Brien's examination of the social background of Irish parliamentary representatives in 1874 and 1880 is insufficiently detailed to be helpful.⁵ And while Irish parliamentary groups cannot be conceived as self-subsisting entities, nonetheless at these points in time political representation bore a very distorted relationship to numerically significant groups in the population. In

terms of the present enquiry one would need to look at the lower levels of nationalist organisation to detect humbler influences. A somewhat similar analysis to that by O'Brien has been performed by Dr. Lyons on the Irish parliamentary party in the period 1892-1910. Using Lyons' data on the occupations of nationalist members in the five parliaments during the interval 1892-1910 inclusive, it emerges that on average 13% of the seats went to local merchants ("men owning shops in the country towns").⁶ This is practically the same as the combined share of farmers and tenant farmers, and is five times the share of tenant farmers alone, despite of course the numerical predominance of the last category. (A distinction between farmers and tenant farmers, based on economic status, is drawn by Lyons. Though the precise location of the dividing line is not indicated, a rough partitioning of the far from homogeneous farming category is useful.⁷)

It is quite clear, then, that parliamentary representation of the tenant masses rested to a very considerable extent with outside groups. Though the stronger farmers constituted a solid nucleus, occupying on average 10% of the nationalist seats, nonetheless the more interesting feature is perhaps their failure to achieve a dominant role in the representation of the country electorate. By contrast, traders are considerably over-represented, and while this does not necessarily imply that the deficit in tenant representation was made up in part from this source, there is reason to suppose this was the case. Indeed, if we are prepared to accept the testimony of a diverse group of contemporaries, traders were even more strongly entrenched in political life below the parliamentary level, that is, in the organisational structures of the nationalist party and in local government.

Thus, a disgruntled figure in the Home Rule movement and later historian of the Irish parliamentary party complained that the conventions of the United Irish League were made up of "half gombeen-men and half political

priests".⁸ The pejorative term "gombeenman" was applied to local money-lenders or, more usually, retailers charging allegedly usurious interest rates on credit accounts. The claim of the writer T.W. Rolleston echoes this charge: parliamentary representation was controlled by the "small country publican and gombeenman".⁹ Pioneers of agricultural co-operation in Ireland such as George Russell, Horace Plunkett, and R.A. Anderson frequently asserted that shopkeepers, publicans and other traders carried disproportionate weight in the nationalist movement.¹⁰ From a different ideological position, the labour leader and marxist, James Connolly, in the course of a blistering attack on middlemen and dealers in the small country towns, speaks of these as "dominant influences in the councils of the local Home Rule or other constitutional national organisation".¹¹ Another writer comments in more moderate terms:¹²

The members of the Irish party are closely connected with the class of country traders. The country traders are the chief men and the capitalists of their districts; they are strongly represented in the local branches of the United Irish League; and they naturally exercise a considerable influence on the policy of the Irish party.

These contemporary comments represent rough charcoal strokes on a plain historical canvas. Greater perspective and detail may be gained by superimposing on this a case study drawn from the agricultural politics of the period.

AGRICULTURAL POLITICS

In the quarter century prior to the Great War the history of agricultural co-operation is rich in instances of conflict between co-operators and farmers. Such antagonisms were not confined to the economic sphere where they originated but rather tended to spill over into the political arena. In fact, co-operators' interest in, and subsequent comments upon, the distribution of political power in Irish society derived directly from

their experience of traders' use of political weapons to contain or eliminate co-operative enterprise. The Irish nationalist movement, particularly after the reunification of its major segments within the United Irish League in 1900, was generally hostile to the economic reforms embodied in the co-operative programme. This position rested in part on the fear that greater prosperity (at least if attributable to a unionist administration¹³) might sap the desire for political autonomy; the fear that "comfort and prosperity will make you less keen politicians, that - like a pack of hounds - you won't hunt unless you are kept hungry".¹⁴ Apart from the matter of political strategy more mundane considerations guided nationalist politicians. Traders were no laggards in making representations to political bodies when they felt their interests threatened. This may be illustrated by reference to a number of controversial debates that illumined the proceedings of the Council of Agriculture and the Board of Agriculture between 1905 and 1914. The Council, which consisted of 104 members, acted as a forum for debate on matters relating to agriculture and technical education and had an advisory role in relation to policy-making.¹⁵ It was conceived essentially as a communication channel between the Department and its clients, particularly those on the land. It is worth noting the representative character of the Council; two out of every three of its members were elected by the various county councils, thus linking it to the recently democratised local government system. The much smaller Board of Agriculture consisted of 12 members, eight of which were elected by the Council of Agriculture, and it was this body which effectively supervised D.A.T.I.'s expenditure.

We have seen in an earlier chapter that the I.A.O.S. was eventually forced to appeal to the Department of Agriculture for financial aid in promoting and supervising co-operative societies. When this request was

brought before a full meeting of the Board on the 25 January 1905, four members were in favour of taking the task of organising farmers away from the I.A.O.S. and reserving these powers for D.A.T.I.¹⁶ One member stated bluntly that the I.A.O.S. should not be subsidised unless it abstained from undertaking any work liable to interfere with shopkeepers or private enterprise in general. A decision was deferred until the February meeting when a grant of £2,000 was conceded on the understanding that non-controversial forms of co-operation only would be supported.¹⁷ A year later the I.A.O.S., still in financial difficulties, sought a renewed grant of £3,700. The Board reluctantly acceded to this request; stringent controls were attached to the grant and the whole matter of subsidising co-operative organisation was referred to the Council of Agriculture.¹⁸ After an inconclusive meeting in May the Council resumed its debate on the issue in November 1906.

The critics of co-operation were first into the field with a motion stating that all work connected with agriculture should be carried out directly by the Department. It was "inadvisable to have further moneys expended through any irresponsible society" (the I.A.O.S.), it claimed, in effect seeking to terminate the grant.¹⁹ An amendment in favour of a continuing subsidy from D.A.T.I. in the form of a pro rata contribution to top up co-operative societies' contributions to the I.A.O.S. was proposed by Colonel Nugent T. Everard and seconded by Fr. Finlay. The amendment was carried by what seems to be a comfortable margin, 52 votes as against 25, with a further 25 abstentions.²⁰ A look beneath the voting surface, however, reveals a more complicated pattern. Voting behaviour, classified according to whether votes for or against the amendment came from the elected or the nominated group on the Council, is set out in the form of a contingency table below.

Table 1. Actual pattern of votes, and the expected voting pattern* (figures in brackets) assuming no relationship between method of selection to the Council of Agriculture and voting behaviour.

	PRO	CON	TOTAL
Elected members	28 (35.1)	24 (16.9)	52
Nominated members	24 (16.9)	1 (8.1)	25
All members	52	25	77

chi-square = 11.8

Those who were indifferent on the issue of co-operation, one presumes, are scattered among the 25 members who abstained from voting, though conflicting ties is an equally probable reason for abstentions. A vote in favour of the amendment is interpreted as indicating a favourable attitude to co-operation and a vote against as indicative of an unfavourable view. These seem to be realistic inferences but the voting totals of 52 and 25 should not be taken as precise measures of the relative strength of proponents and opponents of co-operation on the Council. Some members, though favourably disposed, may have recoiled at the notion of a state subsidy for co-operative organisation, while others, ignoring the paradox, may have felt that a state department such as D.A.T.I. should have sole responsibility for the formation of self-help groups. Others still may have felt there were more pressing priorities for D.A.T.I.'s funds. Two factors, however, greatly reduce the strength of these arguments. Firstly, there was a strand of informed thinking on agricultural development, stretching back to the Recess Committee, that recognised the value of independently organised farmers, in particular noting the greater receptivity of such groups to technical change.²¹ Thus, even within the limited terms of reference of a state department of agriculture

* The method of calculating expected values is explained in most standard statistics books.

the indirect financing of co-operative organisation could be justified in strict cost-effectiveness terms. Secondly, the actual subsidy was quite slight in the context of the overall budget of D.A.T.I.; the lengthy debates and the heat generated bear little relation to the sliver of expenditure involved.²²

Though our impression of the configuration of attitudes on co-operation must be necessarily more blurred than that conveyed in Table 1, a number of points are abundantly clear. But for the solid voting of the phalanx of nominated members, mainly Plunkett's nominees, the outcome would have been much closer. But it is the elected representatives who really concern us here, as it is the behaviour of this group that offers clues as to the popular political forces at work. The elected members of the Council were not nearly so enthusiastic about renewal of the I.A.O.S. grant. Thus, if attitude to the issue was truly independent of the method of selection, one would have expected 25% more voters in favour of the grant from the elected group and a considerably smaller number in opposition.²³ So even at this stage many of the county council representatives were prepared to defy the officially endorsed lines of thought emanating from D.A.T.I. and the vice-president's office. On the face of it, many members of the "farmers' parliament" seem to have acquired a rather circumspect view, if not an actual squint, in relation to what constituted farmers' interests.

With the removal of Plunkett from the office of vice-president of D.A.T.I. early in 1907 it soon became clear that a bleak era was opening up for relations between D.A.T.I. and the I.A.O.S. The new vice-president, T.W. Russell, in the course of his inaugural address to the Council of Agriculture, stated that a delegation of traders had made representations to him before the meeting, protesting against the state subsidy for co-operative organisation.²⁴ Accepting the traders' complaints in full, Russell roundly attacked the idea of co-operators setting up stores in

competition with traders.²⁵ The subsidy had to be discontinued. Though the main charge that state money was being used to promote co-operative shops was unfounded,²⁶ the Council of Agriculture recommended that the subsidy be phased out over a period of three years. As many as one third of the members were in favour of immediate withdrawal though the former course of action was the one proposed by Russell.²⁷

It is, perhaps, worth emphasising that the I.A.O.S. had never promoted co-operative stores; in the words of one observer it could not afford "to excite the hostility of the trading classes".²⁸ In the pre-I.A.O.S. days Plunkett and Anderson had indeed sought to interest farmers and others in such societies. However, they had soon become acutely aware of formidable barriers in their way. Part of the 1892 report from the Irish Section of the (British) Co-operative Union is worth recalling:²⁹

Owing to the influence of the village shopkeepers in most places over the farmers and labourers, the spread of distributive co-operation must needs be slow; but having educated the people by showing them the advantages of co-operative production, we believe the starting of stores to be only a question of time. We hold to our firm opinion that it would be extremely unwise and dangerous to the success of our dairying movement to force distribution upon the Irish people for the present.

The decision taken in 1907 to phase out gradually the I.A.O.S. grant was rescinded the following year. In the wake of a public controversy centering on allegations of I.A.O.S. hostility to the nationalist party and counter allegations of trader dominance in the nationalist organisation, the subsidy was abruptly terminated.³⁰ Not until the foundation of the Free State did the I.A.O.S. again receive aid from a department of agriculture.³¹

In 1910 the I.A.O.S., having lurched from one financial crisis to another, perceived an opportunity of securing funds for the movement. A government-sponsored body known as the Development Commissioners had been recently set up to channel aid to agriculture for development purposes. In January 1911 an application for a grant of £6,612 out of the Commission's funds was forwarded to the Treasury.³² The I.A.O.S. application was referred

to D.A.T.I. where T.W. Russell held it over until a meeting of the Council of Agriculture the following November. Irish co-operators' patience during this ten-month delay was hardly improved by the knowledge that, in the meantime, sister organisations, the English Agricultural Organisation Society and the Agricultural Organisation Society of Scotland, had received interim grants from the Commissioners.³³

At the meeting of the Council of Agriculture, Russell devoted his address to a long attack on the co-operative movement.³⁴ He warned his listeners: "The Development Commissioners may very easily, and with the best intentions, land us in very serious difficulties with the traders of the country." Accusing the I.A.O.S. of being "in effect a gigantic trading body" he claimed that concession of the grant would imply "a cruel war upon the traders and shopkeepers of the country". Any funds available for Irish agriculture should be given to D.A.T.I. which would draw up its own scheme of non-controversial co-operation, this being defined as "every form of co-operation which does not bring us into direct competition and conflict with the ordinary traders of the country". Whether such a pure form of co-operation ever existed was not the subject of detailed discussion (a few years later it was unkindly suggested that lime-burning societies, of which there were two in 1915, exhausted the official category of non-controversial co-operatives).³⁵ Before concluding his speech, Russell humbly noted: "I have probably done more for the Irish farmer than the whole of the I.A.O.S. put together." In view of these services to Irish agriculture it is hardly surprising that the Council were happy to reward him with the decision he sought.³⁶

Russell was not the only one, however, who had put some forethought into the matter of blocking the I.A.O.S. grant application. Denis Johnston, secretary of the United Irish League, had circularised the Council members in advance, charging the I.A.O.S. with ulterior political motives.³⁷

Following the successful outcome of the meeting, he now wrote to a Dublin evening paper stating that he and others had realised that the co-operative movement sought to crush their most loyal and faithful friends among the shopkeepers of Ireland.³⁸ He also released a letter from a Macroom trader thanking him for his exertions on the grant issue. It read:³⁹

Of the many services you have rendered in your time to the Irish people none could have been better than the active part you took in knocking out the grant to the I.A.O.S. We will be sending on a large subscription to the Parliamentary Fund from here soon. Who are the largest subscribers? Why, the shopkeepers of course, who, as you know, have always been the backbone of nationality in Ireland.

George Russell (A.E.) issued a prompt diagnosis in the Irish Homestead: if the Macroom trader represented the backbone of nationality then it must be diseased in its spinal column.⁴⁰ Eventually, though after a delay of more than two years in all, the Development Commissioners rejected D.A.T.I.'s programme of non-controversial co-operation and made a direct grant (renewed in the following years) to the I.A.O.S.⁴¹ This was made subject to the strict provision that the I.A.O.S. confined itself solely to agricultural business.⁴²

What light do these tangled episodes shed on the distribution of political power in Irish society? Without seeking to minimise the role of personality factors, political paranoia, and genuine disagreement on the legitimate spheres of state and voluntary action, it does seem that traders were especially alert, relative to farming groups, at mobilising political resources on their own behalf. Thus, even in the realm of agricultural politics where one might reasonably expect farming groups to be well entrenched, it is remarkable that the views of traders are not only articulated with vigour (both within and outside formal structures) but actually prevail.⁴³ This observation is given added point by recalling that numerically speaking trading groups were insignificant relative to the farming population as a whole.⁴⁴ If political outcomes were simply a function of relative electoral strength then traders would have no hope of imposing

their views where a conflict of interests threatened. Even if one assumes large numbers of farmers were indifferent on the issue of co-operation, this result would still follow from such a crude model of the political process. It is, of course, quite possible, even probable, that whatever the extent of farmer representation within the Council of Agriculture small and medium sized farmers were weakly represented (essentially reflecting Lyons' findings in the parliamentary sphere).⁴⁵ This would have adverse consequences for the expression of views favourable to co-operation. Co-operative societies were much more strongly associated with farming structures characterised by medium rather than large farms; large farmers had less need of group services. (These features are reflected in the spread of co-operatives; the large pastoral farms of the east of Ireland nourished comparatively few such societies.⁴⁶) Nonetheless, however much one seeks to dilute the evidence, the clear impression remains of either a disproportionate weight of traders within the Council of Agriculture⁴⁷ or vigorous interest group activity outside it, or more probably both. Weak political involvement on the part of the bulk of farmers and labourers is also suggested.

These inferences are further strengthened by the consideration of lower levels of agricultural decision-making. A priori one might have little reason to expect trader representation on the county committees of agriculture. However, in 1906 one finds the Gorey District Council passing the following resolution:⁴⁸

That it is the opinion of this Council that the efficiency of the County Committee of Agriculture and Technical Instruction would be increased by appointing practical farmers on the committee instead of traders, who are at present appointed (emphasis added).

If one looks at how appointments to the committees of agriculture were made, a strong trader presence is, perhaps, not so surprising. Members of these committees (as indeed was the case for the Council of Agriculture) were selected by county councillors, normally drawing from within their own

ranks.⁴⁹ That traders were disproportionately represented on county councils was frequently asserted;⁵⁰ tracing the seam of trader representation running from ancillary structures such as the Council of Agriculture and the county committees back to its source in the county councils tends to confirm these views.

A final layer of evidence, referring to a somewhat earlier period in time, is supplied by Clark's analysis of the social composition of the Land League.⁵¹ Traders, among others, were found to play a disproportionate role in organising and giving direction to the final onslaught on the landlord and tenant system in Ireland. Political alertness and trader political prominence, it would seem, date from at least 1880 onwards.⁵²

These findings, taken in conjunction with a number of revealing episodes in the agricultural politics of the time and allied to the impressionistic views of a range of contemporaries,⁵³ strongly suggest a continuity of certain political trends - inverse relationships between representation and electoral strength in the cases of agriculturalists and traders - from the late nineteenth into twentieth century Irish politics.

Before concluding this section a note of caution in relation to regional differences should be added. In the two decades before independence it is not assumed that the general picture of an overrepresentation of traders and an underrepresentation of agriculturalists in the political system applies uniformly across the country.⁵⁴ Only regional and local studies will allow us to refine such propositions still further, but it may be very tentatively suggested that these generalisations are least applicable to regions dominated by extensive farm holdings such as parts of eastern Ireland. Indeed, in this respect it is as well to bear in mind that Clark's findings are derived from the study of a historical episode strongly associated with the western half of Ireland.

DEBT BONDAGE

If one accepts the foregoing analysis then an obvious question arises. How does one explain this situation? The answer, unfortunately, is less than obvious, and the tentative explanatory sketch attempted here owes more to reluctance to bypass a tantalising issue than a simple confidence in the props supporting our argument. However, before searching around for some rudimentary building materials, a destructive role is assumed; the not unpleasant task of first clearing the ground of competing explanations can be approached with greater confidence.

The Home Ruler, F.H. O'Donnell, having condescended to look into the mechanics of low politics, charged that countrymen, locked into a system of debt to local shopkeepers, thereby lost both political and commercial independence.⁵⁵

They lose all power of choice, all right of remonstrance, and all liberty of action, so long as they are in debt to the gombeen-man. Nobody who wants to be anything elective can speak with too much respect of the gombeen-man. He is the curse and the vampire of the countryside. He is the most respectable man in the community, if he be vampire enough About 25 per cent of the keepers of drinking establishments, groceries, general stores, etc., are gombeen-men or are trying to be gombeen-men A country fellow who has run up a bill for a couple of pounds, which he cannot pay at once, has got the hook in his jaw. He will never get loose All the Parliamentarians from Ireland have dozens of gombeen-men among their leading supporters.

This theme - the accumulation of political power through the manipulation of ties based on what is described as debt bondage - has been taken up and developed by two recent writers.⁵⁶ Stripped of the rhetoric, however, the threadbare quality of such interpretations is readily apparent.

The prominence of traders as local spokesmen and organisers in the Land League agitation has been previously noted. It is to strain one's credulity overmuch to suggest that politically active traders (although they were ultimately indirect beneficiaries of the rent reductions achieved) exploited what economic power they had to ensure their emergence in the

forefront of local agitations, the probable rewards of which were none too clear then, while the sanctions of the law were plainly visible and visited not a few of them.

More fundamental weaknesses in the theory of debt bondage emerge when one considers the probable effectiveness of such coercive strategies in terms of electoral success. Some necessary conditions for the exercise of effective control would seem to be:- an extensive area serviced largely by the trader-politician or in conjunction with reliable henchmen (otherwise tied voters would be too few to affect the voting outcome); the ability to regulate this significant proportion of the total electorate through manipulation of economic ties; and uncompetitive conditions in local markets such that bonds could not be easily dissolved. The purpose served by making explicit these propositions is to reveal their implausibility. As will be demonstrated in a later chapter, economic aspects of credit retailing were frequently misconstrued by contemporary critics while trading conditions over most of the country were strongly competitive at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, electoral reforms had increased enormously the cost of coercive strategies. One has to go back before the Irish reform act of 1850 to find conditions for the effective monopolisation of political resources on a major scale.⁵⁷ This being the case, the issue of inflated trader representation or other manifestations of trader power cannot be satisfactorily explained by reference to the crude economic mechanisms postulated (though in some quite exceptional areas the factor of economic dependence may hold some explanatory weight). And, even in reported cases of political abuses based on economic power, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between attempted manipulation of economic ties to generate a political base and actual success in such endeavours. A local election in a remote part of Donegal early in the present century is a case in point. There, a coalition of traders failed to return its nominee despite resorting to some unsavoury tactics, including economic intimidation.⁵⁸

SOME BASES FOR POLITICAL POWER

Having rejected the theory of debt bondage (an explanation, incidentally, which faces severe difficulties in trying to cope with the continuing prominence of traders in public life for more than a half century after the agricultural depression) some strands in an alternative explanation may be developed. Two features, the strategic location of traders in the social structure and the associated consciousness, may tend to sharpen leadership aspirations and the perception of appropriate opportunities. Shops and bars are frequently focal points, in spatial and social terms, for life in the countryside. Typically the local trader is enmeshed in a variety of relationships of a social (including kinship) and commercial kind. To this extent he/she is closely involved in a traditional and intensely local context. However, a necessary implication of the occupational role is mediation of exchanges between the base of society and higher levels. In other words the trader is also engaged in wider relationships, mainly of a commercial character, which extend vertically upwards through the society. The trader - a Janus-faced figure - is both immersed in, and transcends, his/her immediate setting. This position would appear to confer considerable advantage in terms of broader horizons and perception of opportunities on the one hand,⁵⁹ and the ability (stemming from a high level of social interaction) to mobilise local support on the other. Quite probably also, the work rhythm is such as to permit intermittent absence on political duties. By contrast the tillers of the soil, though numerous in the aggregate, experienced severe disadvantages - dispersed over the land surface; caught in the comparative isolation of the farm holding; fenced into rigid daily and seasonal work routines.⁶⁰ While the more substantial traders pushed through the ceiling of local community life, in the case of the ordinary countryman, the family, kinfolk, the land, absorbed his most passionate

energies. Sustained involvement in the affairs of the "outside" world fitted less than easily into the framework of farming or peasant aspirations.⁶¹

In terms of this emphasis, the accumulation of power by traders is not simply a function of the special characteristics of that particular social category but is also related to the political weaknesses of competing groups. In strongly rural societies, for instance, it is quite usual to encounter rigid, tradition-encrusted power relationships that have their basis in steep inequalities in land ownership.⁶² In Ireland, however, the political hegemony of the landed gentry was first challenged in the parliamentary field and later trampled underfoot following the parliamentary and local government reforms of the late nineteenth century.⁶³ For national and religious reasons sources of leadership had increasingly to be found below the level of the self-proclaimed "natural leaders". Roman Catholic clergymen are obvious centres of political power, but it must be remembered also that much of this was exercised indirectly. For instance, priests were disallowed from competing for places on local councils.⁶⁴ At a more exalted level - priests did not darken the doors of the House of Commons. Traders, as well as other social categories such as professional people (lawyers in particular), are obvious beneficiaries of these blocks to clerical participation.

The central theme of this chapter is the unequal distribution of political power in rural Ireland (markedly unequal in practice despite a radical restructuring of electoral rights that in theory allowed equality of access to a broad range of political positions). The evidence assembled strongly suggests that trading interests were overrepresented at various levels of representative decision-making, while agriculturalists were underrepresented. It is not unreasonable to suspect a relationship between these two phenomena. Because social and economic ties linked villages and towns to their hinterlands one does not get a steep shading away of social

contact and mutual understanding at the interface between town and country.⁶⁵ The world of the shop and the world of the farm intersect. Some traders rooted themselves more solidly in the countryside by also engaging in part-time farming.⁶⁶ These considerations, fortified in some areas by the superior status accorded traders by the farming community,⁶⁷ suggest that in the eyes of the countryman there was nothing unnatural in the involvement of traders in agrarian agitations or their prominence as political representatives.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The point should not be stressed. Hurst has argued persuasively that in terms of electoral outcomes the Ballot Act was of little significance. See M. Hurst, 'Ireland and the Ballot Act of 1872', Historical Journal, VIII (1965), 326-352.
- 2 J. Whyte, 'The Influence of the Catholic Clergy on Elections in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', English Historical Review, LXXV (1960), 244-246; K.T. Hoppen, 'Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ireland', Past and Present, May 1977, 89.
- 3 B. Chubb, The Government and Politics of Ireland (Oxford, 1974), p 95. For further corroboration see Al Cohan, The Irish Political Elite (Dublin, 1972), pp 34-35.
- 4 Chubb, op cit. pp 94-96.
- 5 C.C. O'Brien, Parnell and his Party, 1880-1890 (Oxford, 1957), pp 14-20.
- 6 This and following proportions have been calculated from data supplied in F.S.L. Lyons, The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910 (London, 1951), p 169.
- 7 One third of the agricultural land area of Ireland in 1911 was occupied by farms with rateable valuations exceeding £50. As the average value of an agricultural holding for the country as a whole was given as £19, this indicates a considerable degree of economic inequality. Looking at inequality in a regional context, the average value of a holding in Leinster was given as £27 while in Connaught it was a mere £11.
Census of Ireland 1911: General Report, pp 432, 436.

The above indicators are far from being perfect measures of inequality. Apart from problems associated with the original calculation of these

valuations and the corrosive effect of time on their subsequent relevance, there is the further complication that the census commissioners did not use appropriate weighting procedures in aggregating the valuation data. However, as a crude illustration of the point in the text they are adequate.

- 8 F.H. O'Donnell, History of the Irish Parliamentary Party (London, 1910, Vol II), p 464.
- 9 See the controversy centering on this claim in the Freeman's Journal 21 January 1908 and continuing over the following week.
- 10 George Russell, Co-operation and Nationality (Dublin, 1912), p 13 and frequently in the Irish Homestead; Horace Plunkett in the I.A.O.S.'s Annual Report 1907, p 68; R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), pp 115-121. Note also opinions expressed through the medium of the I.A.O.S. annual reports, eg, Annual Report 1909, p 76 and Annual Report 1911, p 22.
- 11 James Connolly, Labour in Ireland (Dublin, 195-), p 240.
- 12 E. Barker, Ireland in the Last Fifty Years (Oxford, 1919, 2nd edn), p 77.
- 13 Lyons, Irish Parliamentary Party, p 105.
- 14 H. Plunkett, Plain Talks to Irish Farmers (Dublin, 1910), p 16.
- 15 The composition, powers and objectives of the Board and Council are described in H. Plunkett, Ireland in the New Century (London, 1904), pp 232-237. Note also Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland): Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry (B.P.P., 1907, XVII), p 814.

- 16 Committee of Inquiry into the Provisions of the Agricultural and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, 1899: Minority Report (B.P.P., 1907, XVII), p 1031.
- 17 ibid, p 1032.
- 18 ibid, pp 1032-1034.
- 19 D.A.T.I., Journal (1907, VII), p 215.
- 20 ibid, p 215. The Journal lists the various voters in favour of and opposed to the amendment. The breakdown of votes as presented in Table 1 is taken from the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the provisions of the Agricultural and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, 1899, p 1035.
- 21 Report of the Recess Committee on the establishment of a Department of Agriculture and Industries for Ireland (London, 1906, new edn), pp 69, 211.
- 22 D.A.T.I.'s net expenditure on the agricultural side of the department's work (that is, excluding expenditure on technical instruction and fisheries) was £128,292 over the financial year 1905-1906. In fact, the department's provision for the purchase of specimens for the Museum of Science and Art - hardly a matter of burning concern to Irish agriculture or agriculturalists - exceeded the amount of the grant to the I.A.O.S. in 1905. D.A.T.I., Sixth Annual General Report of the Department 1905-1906 (B.P.P., 1907, XVII), pp 252, 255-256.
- 23 The finding that voting behaviour is related to group membership (ie, of elected or selected groups) is statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level.

- 24 D.A.T.I., Journal (1908, VIII), p 220.
- 25 ibid, pp 221-226.
- 26 It is, of course, possible that at this stage T.W. Russell was not fully convinced of the true state of affairs (although only the previous year Plunkett, at a meeting of the Council of Agriculture, had specifically warned farmers against setting up co-operative stores).
- Anderson, in his autobiography (With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, p 176), suggests that T.W. Russell's general opposition to co-operation was dictated by pressure from traders and their political allies. Russell was certainly pressurised, but this is at best a very partial explanation of his behaviour. T.W. possessed a very real animus towards co-operation as his extravagant language and persistent public attacks on the system reveal.
- 27 D.A.T.I., Journal (1908, VIII), p 203.
- 28 Labour Co-partnership, August 1898, p 125.
- 29 Co-operative Union, Annual Congress Report 1892 (Manchester, 1893), p 63.
- 30 D.A.T.I., Journal (1908, VIII), p 623.
- 31 The Horace Plunkett Foundation, Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland: A Survey (London, 1931), pp 9-10,15; M. Digby, Horace Plunkett (Oxford, 1949), pp 259-260.
- 32 I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1912, pp 62-63; L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London, 1917), p 84.
- 33 I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1911, p 43; Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, p 174.

- 34 This is reprinted in D.A.T.I.'s Journal (1911, XII), pp 217-231.
- 35 Smith-Gordon and Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland, pp 171-172.
- 36 D.A.T.I., Journal, p 215.
- 37 Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, pp 174-175.
- 38 Evening Telegraph, 18 November 1911.
- 39 ibid, p 5.
- 40 Irish Homestead, November 1911.
- 41 I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1913, p 54.
- 42 Copy of Treasury Letter, dated 1 April, 1913, respecting the Conditions on which a Grant will be made to the Society from the Development Fund (B.P.P., 1913, LIII), p 3.
- 43 The conflicts set out here also had their counterparts in the parliamentary sphere where the nationalist MP's, John Dillon in particular, relentlessly attacked the co-operative movement. Note, for instance, the following parliamentary debates: Hansard, fourth series, CLXV, 839-840; fourth series, CLXVII, 366-369; fourth series, CLXX, 876-884; fifth series, XVIII, 1825-1854; fifth series, XL, 1534-1565.

John Dillon himself had a trading background but it is difficult to say whether this had any real bearing on his views of co-operation. His hostility towards Plunkett, for instance, is probably best understood in terms of a general aversion towards "constructive unionism", Plunkett being regarded as one of the principal bearers of this poisoned chalice. See, for instance, F.S.L. Lyons, John Dillon:

A Biography (London, 1968), pp 2, 175-178, 219, 291, 384; Plunkett Diaries, 9 September 1897, 7 January 1903.

44 According to the occupational statistics of the 1901 census of Ireland the agricultural category consisted of 876,000 people. This is an underestimate as a considerable number of agricultural labourers had been transferred out of the agricultural category through classification as general labourers. The major trader categories of publicans, grocers, general shopkeepers, street sellers and animal dealers amounted to some 65,000 persons. The addition of some further occupations associated with trading would raise this total somewhat more, but would still leave the trader-agriculturalist ratio at less than 10%. This is for the country as a whole; for mainly rural Ireland, that is Ireland exclusive of the half-dozen or so major urban centres, the ratio would be appreciably lower.

45 F.S.L. Lyons, The Irish Parliamentary Party, p 169.

It is hardly without significance that when a specifically farmers' party emerged in 1922 its electoral base rested mainly on the more affluent farming areas in the south and east. See E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland (Liverpool, 1977), pp 78, 147; also F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, p 561.

46 See appendix.

47 Claims of a strong trader presence on the Council of Agriculture come from a number of sources. See Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, p 121; Smith-Gordon and Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland, p 203; Irish Homestead, 18 November 1911. Plunkett in Plain Talks to Irish Farmers (Dublin, 1910), pp 9-11, 37, implies an underrepresentation of

farmers in public life, particularly on county councils and on the Council of Agriculture.

- 48 Irish Homestead, 22 December 1906.
- 49 D.A.T.I. (Ireland): Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry, p 814. A noteworthy exception though was the practice of co-opting clergymen onto such committees. See the above report (p 839).
- 50 E. Barker, Ireland in the Last Fifty Years, p 78; George Russell in the Irish Homestead, (eg, 5 May, 1906 and 18 June, 1910) and in Co-operation and Nationality, p 13; Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland, appendix to the sixth report (B pp., 1908, XXXIX), Q 34,514. Note also the debate on farmer representation in political life at the annual general meeting of the I.A.O.S., reported in Annual Report 1909, pp 75-76. According to a Mr Gegan, speaking about the west of Ireland: "Most of the County Councillors were shopkeepers or non-farmers, with the result that the interests of the farmers were neglected".
- 51 S. Clark, 'The Social Composition of the Land League', Irish Historical Studies, XVII (1971), pp 447-469, and his later extension of these ideas in 'The Political Mobilisation of Irish Farmers', Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, XII (1975), pp 483-499.
- 52 Interesting references to the role of shopkeepers and merchants in political life prior to 1880 are contained in Hoppen, 'Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ireland', pp 77-78, and Clark, 'The Political Mobilisation of Irish Farmers', pp 489-490.

- 53 While few, if any of the authors of these claims can be accepted as impartial observers, there is nonetheless a substantial band of agreement across a wide range of occupational and ideological positions.
- 54 (This footnote space was reserved for a reference to W.L. Feingold's 'The Tenants' Movement to Capture the Irish Poor Law Boards, 1877-1886', Albion, VII (1975), 216-231. I have since acquired a photocopy of the paper but find that it neither supports nor contradicts the arguments developed in this chapter).
- 55 O'Donnell, History of the Irish Parliamentary Party, p 464.
- 56 P. Gibbon and M.D. Higgins, 'Patronage, Tradition and Modernisation: The Case of the Irish "Gombeenman"', Economic and Social Review, VI (1974), 27-44, and by the same authors, 'The Irish "Gombeenman": Reincarnation or Rehabilitation?', Economic and Social Review, VIII (1977), 313-320.
- 57 The picture is complicated to the extent that the trebling of the electorate in 1850, while weakening the position of landed proprietors, meant an accretion of power to the Roman Catholic clergy. In general though it seems that in the second half of the nineteenth century, clerical power notwithstanding, local electorates were neither easily nor frequently deflected from a chosen political pathway. On the electoral influence of the Roman Catholic clergy see Whyte, 'The Influence of the Catholic Clergy on Elections in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', 247-248.
- 58 P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (Tralee, n.d.), pp 102-103. Economic intimidation could, of course, also be used in the reverse direction, that is, customers coercing traders because of their political views. See J.S. Donnelly, The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question (London, 1975), p 328; Hoppen, op cit pp 89-90. It seems probable

that over much of Ireland, the trader rather than his customers was the more vulnerable party if divisive political passions flared up.

- 59 It has also been suggested, rightly in my view, that political communication channels in Ireland are more highly developed in urban as opposed to rural settings - an institutional feature that would tend to favour participation by traders in public life. See Al Cohan, The Irish Political Elite, p 28.
- 60 Berger, in her sensitive study of the Brittany peasantry, observes that the "seamless workday" of traditional agriculture inhibits regular participation in political and vocational organisations. See S. Berger, Peasants against Politics: Rural Organisation in Brittany 1911-1967 (Cambridge, . . . 1972), p 86.
- 61 While it is the case historically that low levels of education have been embodied in the rural labour force, thus constituting a further block to the assumption of political roles, it is not clear if in pre-independence Ireland other social categories such as rural and town traders enjoyed a comparative advantage on this score. One might surmise though that access to educational insitiutions was easier in the urban situation.
- 62 It is interesting, therefore, to find a clerical spokesman acknowledging that in other countries the landed gentry are the natural leaders of the people and justifying the priest's political role in Ireland by reference to the unacceptability, on religious and national grounds, of the landed ascendancy at home. Rev Dr Healy (Bishop of Clonfert), 'The Priest in Politics', Record of the Maynooth Union, 1896-1897 (Dublin, 1897), p 16.

- 63 By contrast, the reform of local government in England was not attended by such radical changes. The forebodings of the gentry that power would pass to the "farmer and shopkeeper or tradesman" at the expense of the local squire were not realised. See J.P.D. Dunbabin 'Expectations of the New County Councils, and their Realisation', Historical Journal, VIII (1965), 353-379.
- 64 "A person being in holy orders or being a regular minister of any religious denomination shall not be eligible as a county or district councillor". Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898, 61 and 62 Vict. 94 (1). (This exclusion clause evinced a bitter reaction from the Professor of Irish at Maynooth College, Dr Hickey; see Record of the Maynooth Union 1897-1898 (Dublin, 1898), p 30.)
- 65 These issues are discussed in a later chapter.
- 66 Of those combining other occupations with farming in 1901, 2,362 or roughly a quarter of those so classified were shopkeepers or publicans. Census of Ireland 1901: General Report, p 131. Very probably an even greater number of those whose main occupation was given as trading also had some farming interests, ranging from the 'little bit of land' to considerable farm holdings.
- 67 The point is illustrated by George Russell. A quarter of a century ago it was the country shopkeeper who furnished most technical advice (and not a little misinformation) on agricultural inputs: "Leaning across his counter, he would discuss all things rural with the omniscience of one who takes in the daily paper." Irish Homestead, 27 March 1909.

APPENDIX

It is claimed that there is a negative association between affluent farming areas and co-operative development. This may be demonstrated by relating the average valuation of a farm holding in each of the 32 counties to the number of co-operatives in these counties in the year 1914. Data on these variables is derived from the Census of Ireland 1911: General Report, p 436 and the I.A.O.S.'s annual report for 1914. As it is assumed that the relationship is non-linear, natural logarithms of our values for farm valuations are taken. The postulated relationship is:

$$(i) \quad C = a - b \log V$$

where C = number of co-operatives (creamery + agricultural + credit societies) per county,* and V = average rateable valuation of farm holdings in a county.

The result is as predicted (standard error in brackets):

$$(ii) \quad C = 92.3 - 22.8 \log V$$

(6.9)

$$R^2 = 0.27$$

$$n = 32$$

As a further check it was also decided to regress the number of agricultural co-operative societies (A) on farm value. This was because it was felt that agricultural societies potentially referred to most, if not all, farming areas. Co-operatives such as creameries, for instance, were more specific to particular farming patterns and regional contexts. The result is again in line with our prior reasoning and equation (ii).

$$(iii) \quad A = 26.6 - 6.6 \log V$$

(2.4)

$$R^2 = 0.20$$

$$n = 32$$

* In a more refined test C might be expressed in terms of co-operatives per square mile in each county (or some similar type density unit). It is unlikely though that the broad conclusions would be affected.

The interpretation of the findings taken here is that co-operative societies are weakly associated with affluent farming areas because the type of group innovations potentially available were unlikely to confer appreciable benefits on stronger farmers. At the other end of the farming scale, it is probable that those on very small, poor quality holdings also derived little benefit from co-operative societies.

CHAPTER 8

RETAIL MARKETS IN RURAL IRELAND

"A vast majority of the country population of Ireland are extremely poor in the sense that their earnings are insufficient." So declared Horace Plunkett, then on the threshold of a tempestuous public career, in 1888. "But their case is made far worse", he continued, "by the fact that they are not able to obtain a fair exchange in commodities for what money they expend."¹ Indeed according to his colleague, R.A. Anderson, in 1935: "Ireland has always suffered from a plague of small shopkeepers."² Here Anderson was merely restating a claim he had vigorously upheld since at least the last decade of the nineteenth century. These brief extracts, apart from their intrinsic interest, point up a basic historiographical difficulty: a consideration of marketing and supply chains in rural Ireland quickly tends to accumulate ideological as well as economic content. While the historical significance of both sets of issues is not questioned, the emphasis is here directed towards the economic aspects. However, separating out the normative and positive elements of the analysis poses severe problems. By using a theoretical framework that makes explicit its value presuppositions it is hoped to minimise tendencies towards tendentious argument.

Evaluating the performance of the retailing system is an essentially normative exercise. The criteria deemed appropriate in forming such an appraisal spring from value judgments; the procedure of testing empirical evidence against these criteria is, of course, positive. In the study of market performance, a theoretical orientation that has attained a wide measure of acceptance is that of "workable competition". Pioneered originally by J.M. Clark it was subsequently developed by other writers.³ It may be seen in part as a response to the severe criticisms from the early 1930's onwards of the traditional theory of the firm and of perfect

competition. In essence, the argument was that perfect competition represented an unrealistic norm for the comparative study of market performance.⁴ Given the standard Paretian welfare judgments it had been shown that social welfare is maximised in an economy characterised by perfectly competitive factor and product markets (with no externalities). However, there was (and is) a basic obstacle to transferring this notion of an optimum from the theoretical to the practical plane. While the stream of economic consequences arising from the competitive model was generally accepted as desirable - the Paretian ethical assumptions commanding a broad measure of assent - there persisted the difficulty that all the necessary conditions for such an optimum are never realised in practice.

Contrary to initial impressions, however, this theoretical "empty box" is not without utility. It places inquiries into market performance very definitely in a welfare setting; maximising social welfare is explicitly the ultimate objective. Market mechanisms and their functioning are important primarily in terms of how they contribute to this goal. Clark, while arguing the existence of market imperfections, accepted that this did not rule out the possibility of widespread competition even where the market structure had the apparent characteristics of being monopolistic or oligopolistic. The crucial consideration was not market structure, but market performance, as evaluated by reference to certain standards which were realisable in the real world. It may be noted that this pragmatic approach to the notion of an optimum bears a strong hereditary relationship to that of perfect competition.⁵ Thus, in a workably competitive market it is suggested that the main benefits accruing from competitive behaviour are secured for the community. The discretion of individual firms with respect to pricing and output decisions is contained within narrow limits. Competitive pressures from rival firms, whether existing firms or potential entrants, tend automatically to enforce desirable patterns of conduct - assuming always that socially beneficial results do stem from a competitive economic environment.

Having established these value premises, it is now necessary to attempt to identify those factors which largely determine whether a market is workably competitive or not. Various criteria have been suggested by reference to which the assessment may be made. Sosnick enumerates twelve variables which may reasonably be taken to have a direct impact on welfare.⁶ Those variables considered most salient in terms of the present study have been adopted from the above source, and have been ranked in descending order of importance as follows: (a) exchange efficiency; (b) technological progressiveness; (c) product suitability and participant rationality; (d) unethical practices; (e) profit levels. It should be pointed out in advance that empirical evidence relating directly to these criteria is not abundant, and of course when distributed among the different heads appears even less so. However, the various strands form a structure which is more robust than the sum of the individual parts.

PROFIT LEVELS

The most difficult and controversial area of interpretation is probably that of profit levels. Indeed, it has a low ranking as an index in part because of problems in the evidence: data is scarce and it is not easy to determine what degree of confidence can be placed in the limited information available. And profit levels are not unambiguous indicators of market performance: large profits may stem from monopolistic or oligopolistic market situations especially if combined with effective barriers to the entry of new firms; alternatively they may accrue to an innovator in a changing market situation and herald long-term gains to the community. On the other hand, tight profit margins may indicate vigorous competition, or by contrast resource misallocation in the form of excess investment in an industry. Thus, considerable care must be taken in interpreting profit levels; yet it is clear that

taken in conjunction with other considerations they provide meaningful pointers.

Taking the itinerant vendors who travelled widely through the poorer rural areas in the early 1890's, it is unlikely that their charges were excessive when all costs are considered. In addition to providing some mild competitive pressure this declining form of trading was socially beneficial in so far as it gave employment to some who could not easily participate in alternative economic activity - women, sometimes single or widowed, Jews and even some disabled.⁷ However, some severe criticisms of itinerant vendors were also made but these relate more to their role in marketing farm produce such as eggs than to the performance of their retailing function.

What of traders with fixed premises? The first secretary of the Congested Districts Board (C.D.B.) noted that in the west shopkeepers were among the few groups such as clergymen and doctors not pushed down to the low standard of living of the mass of the people.⁸ The testimony of another member of the C.D.B., Mr. Walker C.B., is interesting. He appears to accept that some shopkeepers made substantial fortunes in the west of Ireland, but justified these in terms of the important economic functions performed.⁹ A massive volume of confidential reports, compiled by inspectors of the C.D.B. on social conditions in 84 districts in the west of Ireland, is a major source of information on rural retailing. Although not explicitly concerned with the issue, a few of the inspectors provide evidence which implies a superior economic status among traders in some districts.¹⁰

In prosperous areas of Ireland economic differentiation between smaller traders and farmers was probably less marked, or non-existent. Horace Plunkett did not charge the small traders with making excess profits, but rather with incompetence and inefficiency which necessitated

higher charges.¹¹ His fellow-worker, R.A. Anderson, was inclined to take a harsher view, denouncing the village shopkeepers as the overlords of the farming community.¹² Some further accounts alleging over-remuneration of traders relative to the functions they performed may be noted.¹³ Contrary viewpoints come naturally enough from spokesmen for trading interests and also from the editorial columns of many local and national newspapers.¹⁴

Fortunately, in view of such conflicting testimony, some quantitative data are available in roughly sixty of the Inspectors' Reports. This information relates to interest charges on retail credit transactions. It is summarised in Table I, and this should be viewed as providing an approximate picture rather than firm statistical outlines. In 9 of the remaining districts for which no precise information is given the prevailing interest rates are described rather vaguely as low or moderate.

TABLE I

Interest rates (per annum) charged by traders on credit accounts, and their associated frequencies

0-5%	5-10%	10-15%	15-20%	20-25%	25%+
6	14	17	9	6	6

Total no. of cases 58

Note: Co-operative societies lending rates were 5-6% per annum (roughly similar to bank lending rates). Horace Plunkett Foundation, Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland (London, 1931), p. 374.

A number of qualifications are, however, in order. Information on interest charges is sometimes expressed in terms of a charge on large expenditures such as bags of meal or clothes. Thus, the average

interest rate over a range of goods (suitably weighted) may not coincide with the estimate given for a particular district. This is not too serious, however, since the information on credit charges is sometimes given as a range of values, and in any case in reproducing the evidence (in Table I) deliberately wide intervals have been chosen. Two factors bias the estimates downwards. Because regular repayments on credit purchases were made in some districts the effective rate of interest was higher than that reported. It is not clear, however, how widespread the practice of paying regular instalments was. Secondly, where very low or no interest charges were claimed, the inspectors themselves occasionally registered their suspicions.¹⁵ Plunkett claimed, in reference to the poorer groups who bought on credit in the east of Ireland, that while no direct interest was charged on unpaid accounts "no usury could exceed the interest indirectly charged". It seems quite probable that in some of those cases of low interest charges in Table I the current price charged had a credit element built into it.

It is clear from Table I that interest charges by traders considerably exceeded those of commercial banks and credit societies. The chief difficulty in making a normative assessment of these divergences springs from our uncertainty regarding the relative degrees of risk involved, and the consequent incidence of bad debts. In the case of the banks, they could achieve economies through their ability to spread risk over a countrywide trading area. By being selective in their choice of clients and by restricting their operations in the poorer, more remote districts, banks could also hold down the cost of loans. In addition they normally demanded securities from two other creditworthy individuals for even the smallest loans, a procedure which imposed further costs on the borrower.¹⁶ Thus, the bank lending rate is an underestimate of the true cost of bank borrowing particularly to the smaller borrower. Certainly the local trader was a more convenient and accessible source

of credit in many districts. These qualifications, however, do not apply readily to local credit co-operatives who would appear to have faced fairly similar trading conditions and the same problems of inability to spread risks. While they may have been able to enforce slightly greater selectivity in the clients they admitted nonetheless the interest-rate savings introduced by co-operatives are important.¹⁷

How reliable was the rural debtor? A number of Inspectors' Reports draw attention to tardiness in clearing debts.¹⁸ The later experience of the C.D.B. in its activity of making loans available to rural credit societies suggests that the rural community was quite reliable in its credit dealings. The experience of the co-operative credit movement, as a whole, is similar, but a tendency to delay repayments is evident. Smith-Gordon and Staples comment that while farmers and labourers rarely defaulted, punctuality in repaying was sometimes lacking,¹⁹ a situation to be anticipated where incomes fluctuated considerably from season to season. Walker in evidence before the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit describes debtors as "marvellously honest".²⁰ A member of the Select Committee on Money Lending, Mr. Ascroft, commenting on the experience of the commercial banks, claims that "notwithstanding the hundreds and thousands of loans that these banks make to the peasant occupiers per year, it is very seldom that they have to take proceedings to recover the loans."²¹ Overall then, it would appear that very high rates of interest could not be justified in terms of the risk involved, and that some traders were exacting pure profits in the operation of credit services. If one makes the arbitrary decision that only interest charges of 15% or less were satisfactory, then the provision of credit services in parts of the following counties - Donegal, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway - was unsatisfactory in that it sometimes exceeded this limit. (This cut-off point refers only to average interest rates over a local trading area; the competitive price of credit for particular

high risk clients would of course be higher.) It would be rash to presume that excessive rates were unknown in other parts of Ireland,²² but the major problem was concentrated in the north-west and the mid-west counties. This regional variation deserves emphasis. If one makes the reasonable assumption - one also made by contemporaries²³ - that high interest charges were most pronounced in the poorer isolated areas (such as the congested districts) then it follows that trader credit cost less over much of the rest of the country. Credit problems in the west would seem to have stemmed in part from the failure of orthodox banking institutions to adapt themselves to the particular circumstances of these relatively isolated, low-income areas. This point has class, as well as spatial relevance. The reluctance of banks to make credit facilities available to labourers and small farmers forced these back onto other sources of credit.²⁴ Increasing the cost of bank borrowing would, paradoxically, have helped remedy these deficiencies. The usual practice of charging a low uniform rate for private loans could only be sustained on the basis of being quite selective about clients. A less selective policy and a range of interest rates (reflecting the different cost structures associated with different categories of borrowers) would have increased the volume of bank credit transactions and introduced greater competition into credit supply. Alternatively, the same effect could have been achieved by retaining the more rigid policy of a single interest rate, though at a higher level and with increased cross-subsidisation. Interestingly, some shopkeepers displayed a more flexible approach to credit. "Notoriously 'bad pays' are always charged a higher rate of interest", the rate of interest varying with the client's (estimated) creditworthiness.²⁵

UNETHICAL PRACTICES

The agricultural co-operative movement, which from 1889 onwards strove to introduce innovations in the marketing and distributive

spheres, came under severe attack from various types of traders. Among the smaller traders this frequently took the form of wild accusations and distortion of the objectives of co-operative societies. Occasionally it developed into boycotts and other overt attempts at intimidation. Such opposition was not limited to a few areas but sprang up in most counties penetrated by the movement. Not all such reactions could be defined as unethical, but a fair proportion appears to merit the label.

Other possible practices of an unethical nature - collusion among sellers, adulteration of goods, tying arrangements designed to minimise competitive behaviour - must be considered. Evidence on collusion, especially price fixing, is slight. The price war which Templecrone Co-operative Society waged with local traders really illustrates the latter's difficulty in enforcing a common price strategy when under pressure.²⁶ The traders' combination shattered easily when subjected to aggressive pricing policies and invasion of their trading areas. (However, the traders appear to have been successful in maintaining a united front when invoking other sanctions against the Templecrone co-operators). R.A. Anderson complained of collusion leading to monopolistic practices among retailers (and manufacturers) of artificial manures, and in his book describes the break-up of the combination under pressure from newly-formed agricultural societies.²⁷

The possibility of using credit facilities as a means of tying customers to a particular retail outlet did not go unnoticed: "They [shopkeepers] rather seek to have their customers indebted to them to amounts which they consider fairly safe, for these hanging debts insure a continuance of the custom."²⁸ Given the absence in many districts of satisfactory credit facilities, local credit arrangements could be mutually advantageous to customers and retailers alike. However, where such practices were deliberately used as an instrument to break up a local market then they can hardly be considered desirable restraints

on trade. Plunkett complained that a debtor could not break loose from local traders nor "deal elsewhere until he has paid the uttermost farthing".²⁹ Actual instances of the use of credit as an instrument of compulsion have been recorded. Paddy Gallagher in his sketch of trading conditions in the "Rosses" (Donegal) early in this century emphasizes this aspect of credit relationships.³⁰ However, overtly coercive practices were probably infrequent. More prevalent, one suspects, was an unwritten social code that constrained debtors' choice. The chairman of the Belmullet Board of Guardians in the course of a lengthy submission claimed that credit dealings tended "to coerce the borrower from mistaken sense of his obligations to his supposed benefactor, to dispose of the produce of his farm and labour at lowest prices". He went on to claim that the credit system tended to "destroy fair dealing and honest competition".³¹ Further evidence that debts tended to tie a consumer to a particular outlet are provided by other witnesses,³² while a County Down witness held that such a custom did not hold in his district which was under strong competitive pressure from the city of Belfast.³³ It is likely also that credit dealings facilitated certain abuses such as the sale of poor quality or adulterated products.³⁴ However, it should be emphasised that a condition for credit, such as exclusive dealing with a particular retailer until all debts were cleared, is, in itself, not open to objection. This condition might, for instance, be dropped, but presumably only at the cost of higher interest charges. The customer, assuming he had a reasonably clear notion of the costs and benefits involved and that no coercion was applied, would enter such an arrangement only if the "package" of conditions was competitively attractive. In actual practice though it would seem that imperfect knowledge and, to a lesser extent, elements of compulsion sometimes blurred the competitive ideal.

PRODUCT SUITABILITY AND PARTICIPANT RATIONALITY

It seems reasonable to accept that the range of different quality goods and their presentation were largely in accord with consumer preferences (which is not to say that outside observers were always impressed!). One cannot be so sanguine about participant rationality - both on the side of the distributor and the consumer. Desirable norms here are that buyers and sellers should have a reasonable opportunity to be well informed, and should be in a position to exercise freedom of choice in their own interest. Helpful conditions for such rationality are the provision of accurate product description in terms of weights, grades, and physio-chemical properties. More important, price information and the means of maintaining a check on transactions, particularly those conducted on credit lines, should be available. As credit arrangements were a central feature of trading patterns in rural Ireland in the 1890's it is necessary to consider directly the implications for participant rationality.

In practically all of the 84 Inspectors' Reports reference is made to the pervasiveness of credit as a commercial practice. Nor was buying on credit confined to depressed areas in the western half of the country. Contemporary reformers such as Horace Plunkett, George Russell, and R.A. Anderson noted it as a general phenomenon.³⁵ A witness before the Select Committee on Moneylending (1897) quoted the Jesuit economist, Fr. Finlay, as stating that there were 'few rural districts on which the Gombeen man [usurer] is unknown'.³⁶ By the eve of World War I, however, chronic indebtedness to shopkeepers and money-lenders had declined steadily.³⁷

Bartering, a largely regional phenomenon, was to be found in districts in the mid and north west of Ireland.³⁸ There is nothing intrinsically unsatisfactory about bartering arrangements, but where these occur in a context of ignorance regarding precise exchange values,

then welfare losses ensue. "One of the greatest pecuniary disadvantages under which the district labours is the system known as the 'truck' system or the 'payment in kind' system", reported one C.D.B. inspector.³⁹ "This system", he continued, "is the great strain on the south-west of Donegal, and means a pecuniary loss of many hundreds of pounds to the poor people . . ."

Consumer and indeed retailer ignorance regarding the chemical composition of such farm inputs as manures appears to have been widespread. Anderson claims that manures were often evaluated on the basis of their "horrible stench, and sometimes by their hue".⁴⁰ The Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Act of 1906 sought to enforce accurate product description on the vendors of such commodities. Of 202 samples of manures with which guarantees as to composition were given, 40 fell below the specified standards according to official enquiries in 1908-09.⁴¹ This overstates the degree of adulteration, as do results of tests on feeding stuffs and seeds, since sampling was concentrated on the more dubious lots. However, prior to the introduction of the Act malpractices were considerably more widespread.⁴² Retailer as well as consumer ignorance was a contributory factor.⁴³ In the case of feeding stuffs the official verdict was that the position had not improved to the same extent as in the case of fertilisers.⁴⁴ Of the samples of feeding stuffs tested, 20 per cent fell below the level guaranteed while 35 per cent fell within an acceptable margin of error in 1908-09.⁴⁵ Inspectors of the Dept. of Agriculture and Technical Instruction also tested agricultural seeds under the Weeds and Agricultural Seeds (Ireland) Act 1909. The tests showed that a considerable amount of inferior seed - 66 per cent of samples in 1910 were unsatisfactory - was being sold in Ireland.⁴⁶ The worst districts were the western and south-western districts, especially in regard to inferior ryegrasses whose sale was "so general and so widespread that the Department had considerable difficulty in dealing with it".⁴⁷

Some of the seed suppliers admitted that the seeds were pretty useless, ("merely the bye-products from their cleaning business") but in their defence claimed that in some areas farmers preferred cheap low grade seeds.⁴⁸ Representatives of these firms put forward the reasonable plea that no one individual firm could afford to abandon this profitable line unless all other firms agreed to abstain as well.⁴⁹ We shall return to this issue shortly, but the main inference to be drawn now is that consumer rationality and the quality of farm inputs was unsatisfactory in the 1890's - a state of affairs which persisted into the early part of this century at least.

We now turn to another indicator of market performance - technological progressiveness. If technological deficiencies are not to exist in a sector of the economy a number of conditions must be met. Those considered most relevant in the present context include no suppression of innovations, an adequate diffusion of technological information, and adoption of new techniques. The evidence we considered on the level of technological information, as in the case of artificial manures, feeding stuffs, and agricultural seeds, is not encouraging. An appreciation of qualitative differences was only slowly inserted into the corpus of farming knowledge. An autonomous propensity to innovate among distributors appears lacking; attempts to stifle innovation in the form of co-operative societies strengthen this impression.

Much of the explanation for lack of progressiveness must lie in (a) the scale of the problems and (b) the market structure. A major attribute of the latter was the very large number of small firms. The conjunction of these two sets of factors implied that any significant reforms would have to be initiated at a regional or national level. It is quite probable that at least some firms benefited from high levels of consumer ignorance. But even if they had not, no individual firm could afford to engage in the production of necessary technical and other

information services. A minimum efficient scale of operation would be outside the reach of most firms. Furthermore, benefits conferred on an innovating firm would also accrue to competing firms. Problems of internalising such externalities ensured that production of socially beneficial services was sub-optimal. (The case of the producers of agricultural seeds neatly illustrates the problem that arises when social and private benefits diverge). The major services in the present context were related to eliminating illiteracy, developing and diffusing technical information and policing product standards - all clearly areas for state intervention, and historically state production. Indeed the formation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1900 opened a new phase in state intervention in the workings of the rural market system. And anticipating the Department's work by a few years, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society campaigned vigorously and on a broad front for changes in the rural economy including improvements in the description and supply of farm inputs.⁵⁰

As is argued in a later chapter, traders performed essential functions in making credit purchases possible where families depended on uncertain agricultural incomes or seasonal earnings through migratory labour. Sporadic failures in these sources of income often meant that only the local shopkeeper stood between a poor family and near-starvation. However, the effective use of such credit facilities required careful checks and records. In this respect some of the Inspectors' Reports are not very encouraging. The people "being as a rule illiterate, they have absolutely no check on the dealer - anything he chooses to put down they must accept, as they have no possible means of checking their account".⁵¹ A contributory factor was the problem of illiteracy and innumeracy. In 1881, 27% of the total national population could neither read nor write. This was cut to 12% in 1911. However, national figures conceal considerable regional differences. There appears to

have been a much more serious incidence of illiteracy in the western counties.⁵² While it would be foolhardy to suggest that literacy was a necessary condition for consumer rationality, nevertheless it must be considered an aid in promoting consumer welfare especially in the spheres of controlling spending patterns and monitoring credit transactions.

EXCHANGE EFFICIENCY

How efficient was the retailing system in transferring products from wholesale suppliers to consumers? Were productivity gains possible through the exploitation of possible economies of scale, or through horizontal or vertical integration? Ideally one would like cost data from individual firms which might then be contrasted with average or most efficient firms. Even then some difficult problems would have to be surmounted. Adjustments for variation in demand between different areas would have to be made. More difficult still, considerable problems attach to the measurement of outputs in retailing.⁵³

Obviously we do not possess evidence of the ideally appropriate kind, so only the most glaring deficiencies are likely to emerge in this overview. In the final analysis such fragmentary pieces of information should be considered in conjunction with other indicators previously explored.

The supply of certain farm inputs may be a case in point where economies could have been achieved through horizontal integration. We have seen in our overview of co-operative history, for example, how five new agricultural societies in the relatively prosperous counties of Tipperary and Kilkenny succeeded in jointly acquiring over 2,000 tons of artificial manures at a saving of 30 per cent plus on the prevailing retail prices. Possible economies through horizontal integration in other retailing lines where a continuous service was required were, however, unlikely (except perhaps where a large number of people were prepared to make a major break with traditional patterns and establish

co-operatively owned stores). Other possible changes in retailing such as the development of multiple shops, as in Britain in this period, were not suited to the low (and declining) population conditions of rural Ireland.⁵⁴

Rural reformers frequently claimed that the distributive system was inefficient, if not actually exploitative. Plunkett claimed that small traders showed little initiative and enterprise in purchasing their stock; tradition-bound practices resulted in an excessively elongated distributive chain. Goods dearly bought were carelessly stored and no proper accounts kept. While recognising the existence of a large number of potentially competing outlets, he felt that the extensive use of credit trading stifled competition thus allowing weak inefficient firms to survive.⁵⁵ The picture sketched here, based largely on Plunkett's experience in county Meath in the east of Ireland, is in line with descriptions of trading activity in depressed regions in the west of the country. Yet one may wonder how class-specific the observations are. It may be that, at most, the account is relevant only to the experience of the poorest farmers and labourers and those specialising in the provision of their requirements. It is also somewhat difficult to understand, assuming no substantial barriers to entry at the different levels of wholesaling,⁵⁶ why a satisfactory degree of vertical integration had not taken place. It seems more probable that Plunkett failed to appreciate fully the economic functions performed at different points in the distributive chain - movement of goods, provision of storage facilities, and an especially important service for smaller clients, breaking bulk.

Economic barriers to entry in retailing were low. No expensive premises were required as the following description of the typical village shop catering for poorer customers makes clear.⁵⁷

"The houses, often, more correctly, hovels, have no additional accommodation for the business being carried on. If it were not for the few clay pipes lolling their heads against the window sashes as a sign that even luxuries are supplied, you would pass many a roadside house without knowing that you were leaving the emporium of a universal provider. If you go in, you may not be able to see for a while, but on the threshold another sense reminds you that there is more than meets the eye. A delicate nose will at once detect the presence of tea, sugar, and tobacco in the turf-laden atmosphere If you note dirty meal moulding in rotten bins, a few loaves for those whose style of living demands scientifically whitened bread, a few jars of peppermint or sugar-stick, and a heap somewhere of rapidly fermenting dried fruit, and then make an entry of sundries, you have made a fairly correct inventory in the market for the poor."

It is also clear from occupational statistics that traders formed an increasing proportion of the economically active population in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus it would appear that entry into retailing was fairly fluid in most areas. On the whole then (and here we are anticipating some of the findings of the following chapter) the impression formed is of a market structure conducive to strongly competitive conditions and consequently efficiency in exchange. The evidence we considered under the head of unethical practices, however, tends to qualify this judgment of strongly competitive conditions. However, competition and exchange efficiency are not the only elements relevant to the evaluation of market performance. The evidence assembled by reference to the various dimensions of market performance must be considered in an integrated fashion. From such a composite picture, and having due regard for some divergent views, it seems reasonable to conclude that market performance was not satisfactory; there are, however, definite indications that it was improving through time. Among the more serious deficiencies was the underproduction of services with strong public good characteristics - elementary accountancy, technical information and standards, and policing of commercial practices. Indeed the increasing state intervention in the rural market system, as noted earlier, is a priori evidence of this. In the crucial area of credit supply, the formal banking system was less than well attuned to the

requirements of particular categories of borrowers within the agricultural community.⁵⁸ As regards participant rationality, it would appear that the balance of advantage not infrequently lay with traders. Saving features hardly emerge under the discussion of technological progressiveness. A final point is in order. While critics of rural retailing berated traders for most of the deficiencies in the system it is clear that the source, and in turn the solution, to many of the problems lay at societal rather than shop level.

References

1. H. Plunkett, 'Co-operative Stores for Ireland', The Nineteenth Century, (Sept. 1888), 411.
2. R. A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), p. 101.
3. J.M. Clark, 'Toward a Concept of Workable Competition', American Economic Review, (June 1940), 241-56. Two important contributions, both by S.H. Sosnick deserve mention: 'A Critique of Workable Competition', Quarterly Journal of Economics, 72 (1958), and 'Operational Criteria for Evaluating Market Performance' in Market Structure Research (ed. P.L. Ferris), Iowa 1964.
4. An even more radical attack came from writers such as Schumpeter who argued that perfect competition did not even represent a desirable norm. J.A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1947) Chs. 7 and 8.
5. The presumption among many writers is that the more workably competitive a market the closer it approaches the hypothesised price behaviour of firms under perfect competition, or an approximation to it where such is not even theoretically feasible in the particular market under consideration. See, for example, A. Silbertson, 'Surveys of Applied Economics: Price Behaviour of Firms', Economic Journal, (Sept. 1970), 523-24
6. S.H. Sosnick, 'Operational Criteria for Evaluating Market Performance', loc. cit. p. 81. See also E.T. Gibbons, 'The Evaluation of Market Performance', Irish Journal of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, III (1970), 29-42. The ranking of variables in the present paper is quite similar to that recommended by Gibbons (p. 41) for many sectors of agriculture.
7. See for instance manuscript material on such rural traders in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission, University College, Dublin: MS 434, pp. 9, 58; MS 1149, pp. 28, 30, 467; MS 1221, pp. 273-75, 280. See also L. Hyman, The Jews in Ireland (Shannon, 1972), p. 212.
8. W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925), p. 8. In an appendix to this book Micks claims retail margins of about 100% on the sale of tea in the Rosses district of Donegal.
9. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, minutes of evidence, appendices and index (B.P.P., 1914 XIII), Q. 4501.
10. Inspectors' Local Reports (Base Line Reports) 1892-98. (Dublin, 1898). Hereafter the title of the volume is abbreviated to Inspectors' Reports. The report for each district was assigned a number by the compilers of the volume, thus the first report (on the district of North Inishowen) is labelled no. 1, the second, no. 2, and so on to no. 84 (the district of Courtmacsherry). For the sake of brevity each district is identified by its number only here. For profit margins on tea of a fairly similar order to that reported by Micks (above) see report no. 51.

These reports are discussed in greater detail in an appendix to the following chapter.

11. Plunkett, op.cit. p. 411.
12. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), pp. 15, 20, 88. Anderson's anti-trader bias was deeply etched; his statements on the trading system are therefore highly partisan.
13. A.R. Bourne, Co-operative Agricultural Societies, (Leaflet no. 2), Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I.A.O.S.), 1895; Rev. J. O'Donovan, I.A.O.S. Annual Report 1906, p. 125; George Russell Co-operation and Nationality (Dublin, 1912), p. 42.
14. For a very brief sampling of these opinions see Freeman's Journal 3 Oct. 1895, Wexford People 30 Nov. 1895, Cork Examiner 2 April 1896.
15. Inspectors' Reports, nos. 7, 19.
16. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending B.P.P., 1898, [260] X). See especially the evidence submitted by Horace Plunkett, George Russell and P.J. Hannon, pp. 227-47.
17. It should not be assumed that local traders failed to exercise selection; some of the Inspectors' Reports, nos. 5, 17 and 18, for instance, indicate the kind of criteria traders applied in assessing debt-paying capacity.
18. Ibid. nos. 20 and 21. In Clare Island, Carna and South Connemara, for instance, it appears some heavy debts persisted over several years - see nos. 38, 50 and 51.
19. L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London, 1917), pp. 141-45.
20. Op.cit. Q. 4501.
21. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending, op.cit. Q. 2093. See also Micks, op.cit. pp. 95-96; D. Hctor, The Department's Story: A History of the Department of Agriculture (Dublin, 1971), p. 112; Final Report of the Royal Commission on Congestion (B.P.P., 1908 XLII), p. 773.
22. Note for instance J.S. Donnelly, Jr., The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question (London, 1975), p. 324.
23. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending, op.cit. QQ. 1948-49; Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, op.cit. pp. 87-88; Russell, op.cit. pp. 12-14. Indeed there is also considerable variation within the congested districts themselves, as is evident from Table I.
24. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending, op.cit. Q. 2289: Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, op.cit. p. 47.
25. Inspectors' Reports, no. 48.
26. P. Gallagher, My Story: Paddy the Cope (Tralee, n.d.) pp. 84-86.
27. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 89-91.

28. Inspectors' Reports, no. 24. See also nos. 7, 16.
29. Plunkett, op.cit. p. 415. See also long extract from a speech by Plunkett which is contained in W.P. Coyne (ed.), Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural (Dublin, 1902), p. 233.
30. Gallagher, op.cit. pp. 86, 95-98, 103, 118. For further illustration of the coercive use of credit see evidence before the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit, op.cit. Q. 13734.
31. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit, op.cit. Q. 10560.
32. Ibid. QQ, 9151 and 10576-78.
33. Ibid. QQ, 16403-04.
34. Ibid. QQ, 13076-78. See also Summary of Proceedings under the Fertilisers & Feeding Stuffs Act, 1906, the Weeds & Agricultural Seeds (Ireland) Act 1909 etc., (B.P.P., 1915, VI), p. 705.
35. Plunkett, op.cit. pp. 410-11; Anderson, op.cit. pp. 15, 20; Russell, op.cit. pp. 12-14; also Final Report of the Royal Commission on Congestion, op.cit. p. 832.
36. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending (B.P.P., 1897 [364] XI), Q. 156. Finlay's sweeping claim should be taken merely as indicating widespread indebtedness, not usurious practices on a large scale.
37. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit, op.cit. p. 87.
38. C.D.B., Inspectors' Reports, passim.
39. Ibid., p. 88. Note also Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Tenth Report of the Commissioners (1908), QQ. 52, 374-78; Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), pp. 93-94.
40. Anderson, op.cit. p. 17; Irish Homestead, 27 March 1909.
41. Summary of Proceedings under the Fertilisers & Feeding Stuffs Act op.cit. p. 693.
42. Ibid. 699.
43. Ibid. 697.
44. Ibid. 700.
45. Ibid. 694.
46. Ibid. 717.
47. Ibid. 716-17
48. Ibid. 720.
49. Ibid. 720.

50. These activities are summarised in the various annual reports of the I.A.O.S., dating from 1895 onwards. The organisation's semi-official farming newspaper, the Irish Homestead, played a useful role in diffusing technical and other farming information, although it must be recognised that it reached a select rather than a wide readership.
51. Similar comments on consumer ignorance appear in Inspectors' Reports, nos. 2, 5, 7, 13, 15, 19, 20, and 48. (Report no. 2 adds that traders do not exploit this state of affairs). The system of "truck" or payment in kind compounded these difficulties in some parts of the north-west.
52. In 1881, according to census estimates, the degree of illiteracy in the counties of Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Kerry was 40%, 46%, 47% and 35% respectively. (Figures rounded to the nearest decimal point). Census of Ireland, 1881. The reliability of literacy data collected as part of the Irish population censuses is open to question, but it is suggested that as very crude indicators they have some merit in the context of the argument unfolded above.
53. K.A. Tucker & B.S. Yamey (eds.) Economics of Retailing (London, 1973), pp. 10-11.
54. Cf. P. Mathias, Retailing Revolution (1967), ch. I.
55. Plunkett, op.cit. 411. On the issue of competition see the following chapter.
56. This assumption requires vindication. However, in a region in the shadow of the commercial centre of Dublin there appear to be no a priori reasons to suggest otherwise.
57. Plunkett, op.cit. 411. For a roughly similar, though kinder depiction see J. Guinan, The Soggarth Aroon (6th ed., Dublin, 1941) ch. 16.
58. It is interesting to note that contemporary criticisms of formal credit provision still find some echoes over a half-century later. See F.W. Gilmore, A Survey of Agricultural Credit in Ireland (Dublin, 1959).

APPENDIX

The general reliability of debtors in rural Ireland in this period has been emphasised. This merits some explanatory comment. With regard to shop credit, transactions were conducted against a background of detailed local knowledge and of continuing face-to-face relationships. It is suggested therefore that social constraints helped shape the economic behaviour of both traders and clients. Thus as economic exchanges could not be easily insulated from broader social exchanges traders were restrained from moving swiftly and harshly against debtors.¹ On the other hand, the costs of defaulting for a client were also raised. To country people, traditionally secretive about business matters, a hint of financial incompetence or failure had a strong stigmatising effect. In the particularly harsh trading conditions of west Donegal, Paddy Gallagher recalls that it "was considered a great shame to have the bailiff coming to your door", such that a debtor would immediately try to pay off the amount outstanding at the threat of such action.² George Russell was moved to complain in relation to information about credit dealings: "It is very difficult to get precise details unless you come with the parish priest at your back and his influence to aid."³ More than a decade later the major official report on agricultural credit in Ireland refers to the factor of social shame as a

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1. This is illustrated in county Cork during the second phase of the Land War (1884-92) when seven shopkeepers who violated community norms were subjected to boycotting. J.S. Donnelly, Jr., The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question (London, 1975), p. 328.
 2. P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (Tralee, n.d.), p. 103. See also Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, op.cit. p. 71.
 3. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending, op.cit. Q. 2142.

determinant of debtors' behaviour.¹

These considerations would appear to apply with most vigour to intra-community exchanges. However one would expect that such social mechanisms also modified the behaviour of debtors in relation to bureaucratic sources of credit, commercial banks, Congested Districts Board, Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. The efficiency of the legal system in facilitating debt collection, and the evolution of social attitudes regarding the exercise of formal sanctions are also clearly relevant. It is a commonplace to assert that infractions of the legal code such as forcible prevention of eviction or related agrarian crimes implied no social disgrace, and often the reverse.² However given the frequency with which disputants had recourse to law proceedings it is also clear that popular definitions of crime coincided with those of law enforcement agencies over a broad range of issues. Indeed even in the case of agrarian disputes there is some evidence of tenant farmers being quick to evict dairy-men who defaulted in the payment of rent, a penalty sanctioned by the law (while at the same time resisting such penalties when invoked by landlords against members of their own class).³ Such opportunism hardly denotes a fundamental challenge to the institutions of private property or alienation from its legal structures.

In addition to such palpable social controls one might hypothesise that internalised controls also affected the behaviour of economic agents. The role of superstition, myth, and religious sanction in

1. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, op.cit. p. 71.

2. "Sometimes when I go into a little thatched farmhouse, and am led from the raftered wide hearthed kitchen to what is considered the greater honour of the inner room, I see the chief place on the wall between the sacred pictures given to a small glazed frame. It contains the warrant for the arrest of a son of the house as a "suspect" in the troubled days of the '80s." Lady Gregory, quoted in the Irish Catholic, 12 Nov. 1898.

3. Donnelly, op.cit. pp. 144-5.

the regulation of economic behaviour is usually neglected, not surprisingly as the magnitude of the implied costs and benefits is indeterminate.¹ In view of the moral perspectives embodied in much of Irish

folklore, not to mention the pervasive religious influences, it may be unwise to dismiss such cultural factors outright. A piece of oral testimony illustrates the possible implications of such beliefs for probity in economic affairs. "There is no greater fraud in the sight of God than that of a shopkeeper giving unjust weight or measure."

Narrowing the discussion again to the specific issue of creditor-debtor exchanges it is intuitively plausible that enforcement costs are affected by the content of the prevailing morality. That is to say that such costs vary inversely with conscience or other costs, the latter being internally generated and usually stemming from the metaphysical suppositions of the individual. However the efficacy of this shadowy thicket of constraints is hardly amenable to even the crudest measurement, at least within the confines of a study such as this. Possibly detailed cross-cultural studies could shed some light on the issue. In any case, given the market orientation of rural society, it seems appropriate to allow only a small residual role to such factors in accounting for the behaviour of creditors and debtors.² The policing effect of competition, legal institutions, and informal community controls carries the bulk of the explanatory weight.

The concern so far has been to identify various parameters of rural society that are conducive to debtor reliability. Within any particular

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1. Of the slowly evaporating pools of magical beliefs that had formed in the peasant consciousness, a quite considerable proportion related to economic matters. The most extensive collection of these is contained in the library of the Irish Folklore Commission, University College, Dublin. See, for instance MS 117, pp. 41-2; MS 96, pp. 347-8; MS 437, pp. 365-6; MS 815, pp. 74-5.
 2. A stronger case can be made for these factors in relation to non-market exchanges, particularly those involving a one way economic relationship such as the giving of food and a night's lodgings to strangers. For a brief discussion of some economic and anthropological studies that focus on non-reciprocal exchange see N.J. Smelser, The Sociology of Economic Life (New Jersey, 1976), p. 119-123.

period short term factors - fluctuations in agricultural incomes and prices, changes in the lending policies of the various credit agencies - may assume major significance. In the quarter century prior to the Great War price and income movements were largely favourable to rural communities; lending policies in the aftermath of agricultural depression were likely to be cautious. "Shops in this district", it is reported from Spiddle in 1892, "have this year, as a rule, been strict in refusing credit where there was no visible security for future payment".¹ In districts in Leitrim a few years later it is also noted that credit to smallholders was being restricted.² More generally, the necessary role of rational self-interest in regulating the supply of trader credit is apparent: "In a bad year, a dealer is much more chary of giving out goods to any extent than in a good year, and probably £4 or thereabouts would be about his average limit... on a good promise of harvest, or in a good year, he will go as high as £7 or £8 to the same man."³ The length of credit might also be closely adapted to the economic circumstances of the client: for some the credit period extended for a year or more, for others six months, for the very poor it might be limited to a few weeks.⁴

We may now conclude this brief review of the forces making for debtor reliability. Factors affecting both the supply of credit and the demand for credit have been examined in the context of the socio-cultural framework of Irish society. Some features of the system are of a relatively enduring character, the operation of others is more variable in the short term (the course of agricultural prices and incomes for instance). It is clear though from this overview that powerful factors made for a low incidence of bad debts in rural Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century.

1. Inspectors' Reports, no. 53; see also nos. 62 and 63.

2. Ibid. nos. 22, 23 and 24.

3. Ibid. no. 19.

4. Ibid. nos. 4 and 18.

CHAPTER 9

TRADERS IN THE IRISH RURAL ECONOMY 1880-1914

The role and number of intermediaries in the marketing and distributive sectors of underdeveloped economies has attracted both popular and scholarly interest. At the popular level attention has frequently assumed a hostile form, more especially where racially distinct trading communities evolved, such as was the case in Uganda and other parts of East Africa, West Africa, Indonesia and elsewhere. However, even in countries where the host communities and trading groups were homogeneous in terms of ethnic characteristics, social tensions might sometimes ensue. E.P. Thompson, for instance, has recently focussed attention on patterns of conflict between traders and people in eighteenth-century England.¹ The father-figure of modern economics, Adam Smith, was of course aware of the unfavourable aura that clung to certain categories of traders and expressed himself in trenchant fashion on the matter.² What of the Irish experience where the rural economy in the period 1880-1914 would appear to have much in common with underdeveloped regions elsewhere? The final two decades of the nineteenth century heard increasing (though minority) claims that the country population supported bloated marketing and retailing sectors. Rural reformers, clustered chiefly around the agricultural co-operative movement, were particularly vigorous in denouncing the magnitude of the trading community.³ "There are too many dealers for the available volume of trade", thundered the co-operative paper, the Irish Homestead, as it warmed to a familiar theme, "too many seeking to make profit out of the purchasing farmer The burden of parasitic traders for whom there is no call, and whom, nevertheless, the farming community must support, it is high time to shake off."⁴ Were such criticisms

baseless, possibly reflecting ideological confusions rather than economic logic? Such an impartial observer as the social statistician, Charles Booth, was moved to comment in 1886:⁵

It is impossible to account satisfactorily for the increase which is to be found in the numbers as well as percentage of dealers - those who live by buying and selling. This increase cannot be traced to any improved system of distribution, nor can we account for it, as we may in England and Scotland by the fact that increasing production or greater wealth increase the volume to be distributed

In subjecting these propositions to closer scrutiny it is helpful to look first at the development of trading in aggregate terms, and then to concentrate analysis on micro aspects of the problem. By traders in this context is meant those performing mainly retailing functions, and including those who provided credit services.

TRADER DENSITY AND PRICES

Taking the half century after the Great Famine: while the occupational statistics contained in the earlier and later Irish censuses are not readily comparable the broad trends are not in doubt. In the case of rural retailing, the national network extended and thickened under the impact of rising farm incomes and developing consumer consciousness in the more prosperous post Famine decades.⁶ Rising levels of literacy and numeracy may also have positively affected the supply of traders through time, both in terms of providing useful business aids and widening mental horizons. However, the dominant factor influencing the supply of traders was undoubtedly the expansion of profitable opportunities. Moving forward in time, Table I presents census data for four major categories of traders engaged in broadly retailing activities between 1881 and 1911.⁷ To make this summary more relevant to rural Ireland, statistics for Belfast and Dublin, the only two major urban centres, are excluded from the national picture.

Table I. Data on Selected Occupational Groups for Ireland (excluding Dublin and Belfast), 1881-1911

Actual Nos.	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>
Publicans etc.	7,012	8,679	8,548	8,137
Grocers etc.	11,592	12,970	12,209	11,128
Gen. shopkeepers etc.	24,221	23,277	24,581	19,422
Street sellers etc.	2,030	1,986	1,727	1,114
Total	44,855	46,912	47,065	39,801
Nos. per 1,000 of population	9.51	11.16	12.32	10.76
Index no. form 100	100	117	130	113

Source: Census of Ireland data, 1881-1911 inclusive.

The only other category of rural traders worthy of note - cattle, sheep, and pig dealers - shows a broadly similar pattern of change. The numbers of dealers were: in 1881 4,142; in 1891 4,397; in 1901 4,169; in 1911 3,783. Expressed in ratio form (number of dealers per thousand of the population) these emerge as 0.88, 1.05, 1.09, and 1.02 respectively.

While it is suggested in the appendix to this chapter that Table I may exaggerate the degree of change between 1881 and 1901, the relative change (an apparent increase of 30% in these two decades) is of such a magnitude as to strongly suggest a real shift in the occupational structure. How then does one explain this change, particularly over a period in part dominated by agricultural depression? Were there excessive numbers of middlemen present in the rural economy preying on the unfortunate farmer and labourer?

To uphold the rural reformers' case it is first necessary to demonstrate that strongly competitive conditions did not exist and that via one mechanism or another, prices could be adjusted upwards so

as to generate sufficient income to support an uneconomical level of traders. A consideration of the market structure of the retailing sector represents a convenient point of entry into the controversy, Obviously conceived as a single unified national market none of the tens of thousands of independent traders were in a position to exercise market power. However, it is much more realistic to speak of a vast network of local markets and sub-markets linked horizontally with neighbouring markets and vertically as one ascended the distributive chain to regional and national levels. Having clarified the appropriate unit of enquiry, it may be noted that theoretical and empirical studies suggest that such attributes of market structure as the number of sellers and conditions of entry to the market are major causal factors determining individual firm's pricing policy.⁸ In this and the following section the relevance of these two sets of factors is explored.

Fairly crude data on prices and the numbers of retailers are available for some areas in the west of Ireland in the early 1890's.⁹ These allow us to form some impression of the validity, within the context of conditions in rural Ireland, of the first proposition: price is, in fact, related to the number of sellers in a particular market area. Relating these two variables to each other gives a simple correlation coefficient of -0.28. The number of cases is 56, and the result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The sign of the coefficient indicates an inverse relationship between trader numbers and price level - as competitive theory would lead one to expect. This result is given indirect support by a consideration of price variance in congested districts in the western counties.¹⁰ Thus of 95 acceptable price observations from 58 districts, the mean value is 14, with a variance of 60. And in Mayo, for example, with 29 observations from 16 districts the price variance is higher still at 88 (mean value of 16.4).¹¹ These indicate a very substantial variation in prices

between districts, suggesting that prices were highly responsive to local factors. Relevant factors, one may presume, included not only variables such as location, income levels, and volume of trade, but also the density of traders in a particular area.

This discussion may now be related to the evidence presented in Table I. If it is accepted that the price of retail services is sensitive to the number of sellers, it then follows that the influx of traders in the final decades of the nineteenth century exerted a general downward pressure on prices. This conclusion is in direct conflict with the claim by rural reformers such as Plunkett that, in relation to prices, "competition seems to do no good."¹² The "invisible hand" may have worked clumsily,¹³ but the indications are that it was not afflicted by paralysis.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Knowledge of the conditions of entry is fundamental to an understanding of the nature of competition in local rural markets. Claims of attempts by landlords to control entry into certain lines of business activity are not unknown, but there is no reason to believe such restrictions were of anything but exceptional and localised significance.¹⁴ Strictly economic barriers to entry were low. In retailing, given the poor housing and hygiene standards the initial capital outlay was not great.¹⁵ Provision of working capital, mainly to finance credit dealings could be more onerous. Where the trading system was still at an underdeveloped stage, such as in parts of the mid and north west in the 1880's,¹⁶ traders could resort to itinerant selling practices and/or the periodic convening of markets to extend their trading area and reduce their average fixed costs. Invasion of neighbouring markets by "outside" traders was thus feasible, although probably only to a marked extent in relation to transactions carried out on a cash or barter basis. This is an important qualification given the prevalence of credit dealings throughout rural Ireland.¹⁷

However, entry barriers can also stem from political and sociological features of society. Socio-political constraints ensured that attempts by co-operative societies to enter retailing in the period 1890-1910 were blocked.¹⁸ The opportunity of testing the efficiency of existing arrangements, that is, apart from the provision of certain farm inputs where co-operative societies made some inroads, was effectively denied.¹⁹ A less easily perceived barrier to entry of general significance may arise from the interpenetration of the economic and social spheres in rural life. Social networks, constructed on the basis of kinship and other social relationships played a part in determining the distribution of custom among competing outlets. One official report noted that "many shopkeepers in Ireland are themselves also farmers, or are married to the daughters of farmers, so that the line of demarcation between the two classes is often very indistinct."²⁰ The flow of trade along kinship lines is described in a number of sources.²¹ Another, less obvious dimension of the kinship system is highlighted in the following extract from an interview with a townsman who recalls the organisation of retail trade and the forms of recruitment into it at the beginning of the present century.

Most of the [town] houses - that would be shops, groceries, publicans - they'd be all based on the country, and in taking apprentices . . . they'd look into the connection, the connection of the young lad that would be proposed to them; what relations he had, because all those relations were potential customers. The family [system] ruled that way . . .²²

Forms of product differentiation are also relevant when considering access to rural markets. Even where a client could not presume some definite non-economic ties with a trader the products of a particular outlet were differentiated to the extent that such goods and services were identified with a particular family or individual. Also it is not without significance for their commercial strategy that businesses in rural Ireland had the family name - a form of general trade mark - emblazoned over the premises. The factor of location is a further feature

conferring differential benefits on retail outlets. One should note, though, the role of improved communications, and the part played by travelling shops and even mail order firms in reducing the isolation of local markets.²³ The effect of these differentiating features is to tend to fragment local markets - a tendency that might appear to have adverse welfare implications. This is to neglect, however, that clients derive satisfaction from such features as convenience and the psychic benefits associated with regularised and friendly social intercourse, particularly where this is reinforced by kinship bonds.²⁴ To condemn such differentiating features as of spurious value is to attribute to consumer ignorance what can be more realistically viewed as consumer preference. Also when one considers the vulnerability of farming incomes to such uncontrollable variables as weather and disease it is hardly pure sentiment that impelled farmers to build up social and economic ties with a particular or a few local retailers. In times of adversity, such as the years of disastrous harvests in the 1880's, claims to favourable treatment could be based on such relationships.

SIZE OF THE RETAILING SECTOR

What then of the charge that rural Ireland sustained an oversized retailing sector in the period 1880-1914? A consideration of market forms, allied to our previous discussion of social and economic aspects of retailing, allows us to draw reasonably firm conclusions. For the country as a whole, the large number of outlets, particularly from 1890 onwards, ensured that local monopolies were generally not possible. However, in isolated rural areas, mainly in the west of Ireland, probably a not uncommon market form before 1890 was one of a limited number of sellers, each with a degree of monopoly power, and shielded in part by transport and information costs from contiguous markets. In cases of such limited local monopolies, underinvestment or too few resources committed to retailing was the problem, (a point which would

have surprised some rural reformers). These local deviations from the dominant patterns were increasingly reduced from the 1880's onwards. Thus looking at changes in the four trader categories, as defined for Table I, western poor law unions registered substantial increases between 1881 and 1891: Dunfanaghy (+117%), Glenties (+9%), North Inishowen (+29%), Milford (-5%), Glenmaddy (+12%), Oughterard (+52%), Clifden (-1%), Gort (+22%), Mount Bellew (+42%), Belmullett (+120%), Kilalla (+15%), Westport (+44%), Manor Hamilton (-14%), Dromore West (-12%), Tobercurry (+10%), Caherciveen (+6%), Dingle (+22%), Kenmare (+14%), Bantry (+73%), Castletown (+5%), Skibbereen (+19%), and Skull (+38%). The figures in brackets represent the percentage change in total numbers in the selected trader categories between the two censal dates. The calculations are based on census data, and the poor law unions included are those with little, if any urban development. Thus of the 22 poor law unions examined, 18 showed higher levels of increase than that nationally (see Table I), some indeed registering increases far in excess of the national average of 4.6%. Such a strong supply response indeed tends to suggest the existence of elements of monopoly rent. It also casts an interesting splinter of light on a further issue. The supply of entrepreneurs in the rural economy, at any rate as far as retailing is concerned, is shown to be highly elastic in this period. What implications this might have for the supply of entrepreneurship generally in the economy is problematic, but it does at least suggest no entrepreneurial failure in this sphere.²⁵

Taking once again a countrywide rather than a regional focus, the possibility that the national pattern was composed mainly of congeries of local monopolies has been ruled out in view of the density of retail outlets (Table I), the ease of entry to markets, and the fact that criticisms of traders centred on their apparent profusion rather than their scarcity. There are some grounds, however, for suggesting that

the market form approximated that of monopolistic competition in at least some of the local markets. Predictions of the model of monopolistic competition, that firms will engage in product differentiation and other forms of non-price competition (such as the cultivation of personalised forms of trade) are consistent with certain empirical observations made here. A further prediction of the model, and one with obvious relevance for the rural reformers' concern with the large numbers of traders, is that each firm (and consequently the industry as a whole) is forced into a position of having unused capacity. This point, however, even if one accepts the excess capacity theorem, does not vindicate the reformers' concern. The importance of the proposition rests on the existence of substantial fixed costs. Such a cost structure did not apply to retailing in this period; premises were fairly simple; the owner's time was divisible (other occupations could be, and indeed were combined with trading).²⁶ A different but more relevant type of excess capacity, given competitive conditions and the ease of entry into retailing, stemmed from disequilibrium in retail markets. Table I shows an efflux of traders after 1900, and while this overstates the real outflow,²⁷ the movement is nonetheless significant. This suggests some overcrowding in trading occupations by the turn of the century.

How seriously, though, one regards the situation hinges crucially on a judgment of conditions in the rest of the economy. What is important is not the efficiency of the retailing sector in any absolute sense, but rather its efficiency relative to other sectors of the economy. Was the marginal productivity of factors of production elsewhere in the economy that much greater, if at all? Transferring resources, mainly labour, into agriculture was hardly likely to appreciably affect national income, given the large rump of subsistence farming and disguised unemployment existing there.²⁸ In relation to industrial development, labour supply was not the limiting factor. The quantitatively much smaller effect - the freeing of capital resources in an economy with an already high

savings capacity and a shortage of investment outlets²⁹ - would have been of negligible significance. In short, the social opportunity cost of overcrowding in retailing appears low.

Lest the foregoing account of competitive pressures in retailing should conjure up an unduly rosy picture, it should be recalled from the previous chapter that other aspects of market performance left much to be desired. Rural reformers misconstrued certain economic aspects of retailing: the safeguards to consumer welfare implied by large numbers of retailers for instance. In the course of their propaganda they sometimes exaggerated inadequacies in the system: a striking illustration of this being George Russell's assertion in 1912 that "this year the Department of Agriculture found that 60% of the seeds sold in Ireland were adulterated".³⁰ However, there were important deficiencies in the distribution system, and these represented significant targets for reforming zeal. In addition, welfare losses arising from unethical or unsatisfactory practices were concentrated on some of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the population - a point frequently made by reformers.³¹ If one takes the normative step of weighting more heavily the welfare of such groups then the case for reform measures is further strengthened.

As regards the apparently high levels of traders in the rural economy, this is largely explicable, not by reference to excess capacity in the distributive sphere, but by reference to the labour intensive nature of trading. A low level of capital inputs, restricted consumer mobility, and the wide geographical area to be serviced implied large numbers of distributors. This view is supported by a number of modern studies, drawing on investigations in such diverse rural settings as West Africa, Uganda, Malaya, Sarawak, and Haiti. These suggest that the apparent profusion of middlemen is essential to the functioning of the local economies.³² Thus, for example, Mintz argues that the large

proportion of middlemen successfully interposing itself between producer and consumer is in no sense economically redundant. In the classic work in this field Bauer concludes that apprehension regarding the multiplicity of middlemen in West African trade springs from a confusion of technical with economic efficiency: in developing economies there is mass substitution of labour, a relatively abundant factor, for capital a relatively scarce factor. In a fairly similar vein, Ward argues that large numbers of money-lenders in rural communities can be justified by reference to the special difficulties of credit provision in rural economies, in particular, the need to have an intimate knowledge of the position and prospects of a client. The requirement of reliable personal information places a limit on the number of clients that can be serviced by a particular money-lender, a consideration that also applies in the case of credit retailing as in rural Ireland.

SOME GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

A final issue has yet to be resolved: the relative increase in trader numbers, particularly the noteworthy surge in the closing decades of the century. This is best explored in the context of larger patterns of change in the rural economy. The troubled character of late nineteenth century Irish agriculture requires little elaboration. From roughly the mid 1870s to the mid 1890s farm product prices slumped, tillage and dairying being particularly adversely affected.³³ Again if one uses the numbers of paupers and of overseas emigrants as indicators of employment prospects in rural Ireland, this period emerges in a distinctly pessimistic light.³⁴ An increase in the relative size of groups servicing the agricultural community is, on the face of it, an unlikely concomitant of rural crisis. Some help with this paradox is afforded by Solow's rough calculation that while product prices fell, the burden of rents and the general price level fell sufficiently to maintain farm incomes in real terms.³⁵ In addition, emigrants' remittances and earnings from migratory labour were important in propping up the especially vulnerable economy

of the west of Ireland.³⁶ As regards agricultural labourers, their real wages showed an upward tendency.³⁷ However, while aggregate purchasing power held up (with obvious consequences for the demand for retail services) employment opportunities continued to contract. The major responses to the gloomy employment situation were those of emigration and the retention of family labour on the farm. In relation to the latter it is likely, as in other peasant settings, that much family labour was maintained even when the marginal product of such labour had fallen below the level of the local agricultural wage (taking this as indicating the marginal cost of labour).³⁸ However, while such reactions undoubtedly predominate, it may be tentatively suggested that surplus labour flowing off the land also found its way into trading activity. A shift of resources - principally human, though some capital also - out of farming and into retailing is to be expected if the opportunity cost of trading in terms of farm work (for sons and daughters on family farms) declined in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. This seems probable in the context of changes in Irish agriculture in this period. Tillage farming suffered a drop of 35% in acreage terms between 1871 and 1901; dairying another farm activity with a high labour input failed to compensate for this drift towards labour extensive farming, the national cow herd actually showing a slight decline over the same period.³⁹ Other things being equal, this would imply a diminution in the value of family labour services - the family, of course, being the major source of labour on most farms. In other words, there is a tendency for the average and marginal value of such labour to decline in the late nineteenth century, thus pointing up the relative attractiveness of off-farm occupations such as trading, on a full or part-time basis.⁴⁰ Close links between farming and rural trading have been noted earlier. Very probably also the social origins of rural traders lay to a considerable extent in the farming community.⁴¹ All this suggests that transfers

into trading were facilitated by the socio-economic environment; indeed the sons and daughters of farmers held a comparative advantage in making such a transition given the role of kinship in determining patronage. In brief, it was a short distance from the farmyard to the other side of the shop counter in rural Ireland.

In this chapter particular changes in one area of the services sector of the rural economy have been charted over the main period of agricultural depression and onto the eve of the Great War. The issues of entry to markets, different market forms, and the large numbers performing trading functions have been discussed. The claim, advanced by some critics, that distributive margins could be arbitrarily inflated to support a heavy tier of largely redundant middlemen is firmly rejected. The magnitude and composition of the tertiary sector, as in many underdeveloped countries, was one reflection of the scarcity of remunerative employment elsewhere in the economy. The services sector had increased its size relative to the total occupied population in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though some of the increase was accounted for by professional and other occupations associated with economic development, domestic service - by far the largest component - registered a very substantial increase.⁴² The latter development is hardly an indication of economic progress, a point confirmed by contrasting the relatively industrialised north east of Ireland and the strongly agricultural remainder of the country. Thus, while in Antrim and Down in 1901 6.8% of those with specified occupations were in domestic service, in Ireland as a whole the proportion was 9.9%, or close to one and a half times the level for the north east.⁴³ These features are a bleak reminder of the cumulative failure of the Irish economy throughout the nineteenth century - the failure to accommodate population increase through rapid economic growth, the failure to industrialise on a broad front.

References

1. E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, no. 50 (1971), 76-136.
2. "The prejudices of some political writers against shopkeepers and tradesmen, are altogether without foundation. So far is it from being necessary . . . to restrict their numbers, that they can never be multiplied so as to hurt the public, though they may so as to hurt one another." Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations (Cannan edn. Reprint 1961), I, p. 382. For a bizarre instance of unfavourable attitudes towards middlemen in a social setting lacking a historical continuity of its own see R.A. Radford, 'The Economic Organisation of a P.O.W. Camp', Economica, XII, 1945.
3. See for instance, George Russell, Co-operation and Nationality (Dublin, 1912), ch. 3; L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (1917), p. 227; H. Plunkett, 'Co-operative Stores for Ireland', Nineteenth Century, Sept. 1888, 410; Irish Homestead, no. 2, March 1895 and frequently thereafter.
4. Irish Homestead, 1 Jan. 1910.
5. C. Booth, 'The Economic Distribution of Population in Ireland', in W.P. Coyne, ed. Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural (Dublin, 1902). This is an extract from a paper read by Booth to the Royal Statistical Society in 1886.
6. L.M. Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland since 1660 (1972), pp. 138-51; L.M. Cullen, Life in Ireland (1968) pp. 155-66; J. Lee, Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918 (Dublin, 1973), pp. 12-14, 48.
7. The full occupational heads for the four categories are as follows: innkeeper, hotel keeper, publican; grocer - tea, coffee, chocolate maker/dealer; general shopkeeper, dealer; costermonger, huckster, street seller.
8. P.L. Ferris, ed. Market Structure Research (Iowa, 1964); R. Clodius and W. Mueller, 'Market Structure Analysis as an Orientation for Research in Agricultural Economics', Journal of Farm Economics, XLIII, no. 3 (1961); D. Metcalf, The Economics of Agriculture (Penguin 1969), ch. 5.
9. The source of the price information - interest rates charged on credit transactions by traders - is the Inspectors' Local Reports 1892-98, compiled by the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1898). Interest rate is taken as a proxy for the average price of retail services. Data on numbers of retailers are from the Census of Ireland 1891. The nature of the sources and the usefulness of the data are discussed in the appendix.
10. Congested Districts Board, Inspectors' Local Reports (1898).
11. To summarise data on the dispersion of prices: the co-efficient of variation for all 58 districts is 0.55; for constituent sub-regions such as Donegal, Mayo, Galway-Roscommon the values are 0.46, 0.57 and 0.48 respectively. In the south west, while the information available is mainly qualitative, price levels and price variation appear substantially lower.

12. Plunkett, loc. cit. p. 411.
13. The pointers used above are, by themselves, too rough to allow us to go on to draw firm conclusions about the strength of competitive forces. The following section advances further the discussion on this point.
14. Irish Folklore Commission, MS 407, pp. 216, 259.
15. For a description of the structure and contents of a typical rural shop see Plunkett, op.cit. p. 411; also R. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London, 1935), pp. 4-6.
16. For accounts of trading in the north west see P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (Tralee, n.d.) passim; W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board (Dublin, 1925), p. 8 and appendix 3; Congested Districts Board, op.cit., relevant district reports.
17. The best survey of the question of rural credit in this period is the Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (B.P.P., 1914, XIII).
18. Note also, for example, some recent studies emphasising the role of social and political factors in constraining the operation of the land market: J.S. Donnelly, The Land & The People of Nineteenth-Century Cork (London, 1975); E.D. Steele, Irish Land & British Politics (Cambridge, 1974); B.L. Solow, The Land Question & The Irish Economy 1870-1903 (Cambridge, Mass. 1971).
19. The course of this conflict is best followed through the medium of contemporary local newspapers.
20. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), p. 79.
21. The most lucid account is C.M. Arensberg, The Irish Countryman (Gloucester, Mass. 1959), ch. 5; note also Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, Annual Report 1912 (Dublin, 1913), p. 50.
22. This is an extract from a taped interview in the possession of the writer. It relates to trading activity in the market town of Nenagh at the turn of the century.
23. J. Lee, 'The Railways in the Irish Economy' in L.M. Cullen, ed. The Formation of the Irish Economy (Cork, 1969), pp. 77-87.
24. For some perceptive comments on product differentiation and related issues in retailing see J. Hood and B.S. Yamey, 'Imperfect Competition in Retail Trade' in K.A. Tucker and B.S. Yamey, eds. Economics of Retailing (Penguin, 1973), pp. 119-121.
25. While a formal debate has not, as yet, crystallised around the entrepreneurial factor in nineteenth-century Irish economy, the elements of such are present in a number of contributions. Note in particular: J. Lee, 'Capital in the Irish Economy' in L.M. Cullen ed., The Formation of the Irish Economy (Cork, 1969), pp. 53-63; Lee, The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918 (Dublin, 1972) pp. 14-20; J.S. Donnelly, jun. 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Butter Trade', Studia Hibernica, XI (1971), 130-63;

C. Ó Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914', Economic History Review, 2nd ser. XXX (1977), 284-305.

26. In 1901, 10,592 occupiers of land combined subsidiary pursuits with farming. Almost a quarter of these were involved in the shopkeeping or pub trade. Census of Ireland 1901: General Report, p. 131. Though the Census does not provide information on the point, there is no doubt that some of those whose main occupation was classified as trading also combined some farming activity with trade. See, for example, Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Tenth Report of the Commissioners (B.P.P., 1908, XLII), QQ. 52545, 54944-45.
27. See appendix.
28. For a brief discussion see Crotty, op.cit., appendix 4. See also Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interest (B.P.P., 1881, XV) p. 7 and Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Final Report (Parl. Papers, 1908, XLII) p. 744.
29. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (B.P.P., 1914, XIII) pp. 21-22; L.M. Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland since 1660 (London, 1972), pp. 168-69.
30. Russell, Co-operation & Nationality, p. 21.
31. Plunkett, op.cit. pp. 410-11; Russell, op.cit. pp. 8-10.
32. S. Mintz, 'Pratik: Haitian Personal Economic Relationships' and B. Ward, 'Cash or Credit Crops', both in Potter, Diaz, and Foster, eds. Peasant Society (Boston, 1967); P.T. Bauer, West African Trade (1963), ch. 2.
33. T. Barrington, 'A Review of Irish Agricultural Prices', Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, XV, 1926-27. A closely documented regional study which brings out much of the detail of the crisis years is Donnelly, op.cit. passim.
34. A. Schrier, Ireland and the American Emigration 1850-1900 (Minneapolis, 1958) pp. 157, 165.
35. B.S. Solow, The Land Question and the Irish Economy (Cambridge, Mass. 1971), pp. 179-81; also M.J. Bonn, 'The Psychological Aspect of Land Reform in Ireland', Economic Journal, XIX, 1909, 392-93. It is also quite probable that with rent controls the redistribution of income in favour of tenants altered the structure of demand in a manner favourable to the bulk of small retailers.
36. Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Final Report (B.P.P., 1908, XLII), 744-45.
37. A.L. Bowley, 'The Statistics of Wages in the United Kingdom during the last Hundred Years - contd. (Part III) Agricultural Wages in Ireland', Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXII (1899), 395-404. According to Bowley's calculations, the average weekly wages of ordinary day labourers increased from 7s-10d in 1870 to 10s-8d in 1894, an even more significant advance when viewed against the backdrop of a generally deflationary period.
38. Cf. E.R. Wolf, Peasants (New Jersey, 1966), pp. 13-15; D. Thorner, 'Chayanov's Concept of Peasant Economy', in Thorner, Kerblay, and

Smith, eds. A.V. Chayanov: The Theory of Peasant Economy (Illinois, 1966), pp. xi-xxiii; Crotty, Irish Agricultural Production, op.cit. pp. 325-26. Crotty, for instance, has calculated for 1927 that on Irish farms of 50 acres and less, employing 64% of permanent adult males, the marginal product of labour was no more than one half the wage of an agricultural worker. Most of this labour would have been non-hired family help, insulated by kinship ties from the full pressures of the labour market.

39. Agricultural Statistics of Ireland 1910 (P.P. 1911, C), pp. 523, 573.
40. If this is the case then there is a strong element of truth in the blunt comment of Charles Booth: the increase in the number of traders "can only be taken as a sign of want of more useful employment". Booth, loc. cit. p. 68. On the scarcity of employment opportunities, it may be noted that a similar line of reasoning has been used by some commentators in explaining the crowding into services by British workers in the inter-war period. See R.C.O. Matthews, 'British Economic Growth 1951-73: Success or Failure?', Ninth Geary Lecture (Dublin, 1976), p. 10. A more detailed discussion of employment and output trends in the services sector is D.H. Aldcroft, The Inter-War Economy: Britain 1919-39 (London, 1970), pp. 207-42.
41. Note, for example, Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), p. 79 and S. Clark, 'The Political Mobilisation of Irish Farmers', Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology, XII (1975), p. 490. For a slightly earlier period Clark calculates that of a sample of 75 traders and business proprietors in one western district, no less than 40% were farmers' sons.
42. See Booth loc. cit. pp. 54-62; also notes on the census of 1891 prepared by Booth for the Royal Commission on the Financial Relations between Great Britain and Ireland: Final Report (B.P.P., 1896, XXXIII), pp. 515-16; Census of Ireland 1891: General Report, p. 23; Census of Ireland 1901: General Report, p. 23.
43. Uneven economic development in Ireland, and the importance of domestic service as a source of employment outside the north east, is even more strikingly underlined if domestic service is expressed as a proportion of the industrial class (categories as defined in the 1901 Census). The ratio for Ireland as a whole is a massive 30% as compared to 12% for the north east. Census of Ireland 1901: General Report, p. 115; Census of Ireland 1901: County of Down (p. 69), County of Antrim (p. 72), City of Belfast (p. 13).

APPENDIX

It is necessary to voice an important qualification in relation to occupational statistics such as those used in Table 1. As one pushes backwards in time the degree of specialisation in the economy normally declines. A consequence of this is that such statistical artefacts as occupational categories reflect with decreasing accuracy the distribution of activity in the economy. (This is particularly so in relation to less developed economies.) The role specialisation implicitly assumed in the occupational classification is violated by an increasing incidence of multiple roles. Thus apparent changes through time in the occupational structure may be nothing more than statistical illusion.¹ Indeed it is to the credit of the compilers of the Irish census of 1871 that they were alive to the existence of these (and other) difficulties. Thus they found "a very considerable number of persons who have inserted more than one calling", and of the "large and extremely interesting variety of combinations" they cite such examples as "farmer, grocer, and draper", and "farmer, grocer, draper, and carpenter". Uncritical reliance on census data could easily lead to underestimation of the total level of activity in particular spheres, in these instances the provision of grocery, drapery, and carpentry services. The corollary to this is that the level of activity in major areas of the economy such as agriculture, is exaggerated.

Clearly these complications pose problems of interpretation for the period 1881-1911 (and even greater problems for earlier periods), although an appreciation rather than worship of the difficulties appears in order. It may be reasonably claimed that over this period the four trader categories selected had crystallised out as independent clusters of occupations to quite a considerable extent. Nor is there much evidence of a rapidly declining pool of multiple occupations feeding into the overall numbers

of traders between the terminal dates. Thus the numbers of occupiers of land who were also engaged in other economic pursuits showed slow change, falling from 10,382 in 1881 to 9,710 thirty years later.² It would be misleading though not to acknowledge that some specialisation within the retailing sector was taking place. Thus while Table I shows a decline in the numbers and density of traders after 1900, the real outflow is not as marked as our statistical summary suggests. The decline is real enough, but its extent is exaggerated as a result of the rigid measure of retailer density used here. It is evident from Table I that the greatest decline took place among general shopkeepers. Inspection of the census data indicates that the retailing system was becoming more diversified in the early twentieth century; thus while unspecialised traders such as general shopkeepers suffered a relative decline, more specialised retail services tended to develop. The latter are not embraced by our four selected categories of retailers.

Prices and Trader Numbers

Fairly crude data on prices and numbers of retailers is available for some regions in the early 1890's. Information on prices - interest rates charged on credit transactions by traders - is derived from detailed reports on 84 districts in the west of Ireland. These reports were compiled by inspectors of the Congested Districts Board soon after its inception in 1891.³ W.L. Micks, who was closely involved with these investigations, noted later: "Most, indeed I should say all, of the Inspectors had intimate previous experience of the localities, but some months had to be spent in local enquiries by each Inspector before he made his report on any district."⁴ In reporting on interest rates charged by traders on credit accounts, the inspectors sometimes give a single average charge, though more usually a range of charges is given. Thus in the district of Ballyshannon we are informed that interest rates are in the range of 10-15% per annum.⁵ This, incidentally, means that

we have two price observations for such a district: the two ends of the range. In calculating an average interest rate (price level) for a district a simple average of the top and bottom values was taken. In the inspectors' reports, interest rates were sometimes also expressed as a charge on a large item of purchase, such as a bag of meal or flour. In the district of Inver (Donegal), for example, "generally speaking about 1s. interest would be charged on a bag of meal for six months, or 2s. a year on 14s. or £14-5s.-8d. per cent per annum."⁶ As meal and flour were major elements in the family expenditure pattern these are taken as acceptable, if rough bases, on which to calculate rates. On a few occasions the C.D.B. inspectors noted that repayment by installments within the credit period was sometimes practised. The effect of this is to increase the effective interest rate. No allowance for this could be made here, with the consequence that our calculated rates understate somewhat the true situation.

Ideally one would wish to match these local price levels to trader densities in the same districts. This would be a quite straightforward task if occupational statistics were available at district level. However, the most detailed breakdown of occupations in the Irish census is for a considerably larger geographical unit, the poor law union (p.l.u.). To meet this difficulty, the following crude procedure had to be adopted in correlating price and trader density. It was assumed for the purposes of the statistical exercise that the density of traders at the level of the p.l.u. also applied at the level of any of its constituent districts. Where a C.D.B. district was partly in one p.l.u. and partly in another then a simple average of the density of traders in the two unions was taken. This drastic dilution of the trader density variable is to load heavily the correlation test against revealing any significant relationship between the two variables. Despite this a significant relationship, of the kind suggested by competitive theory, does emerge;

one may presume that the underlying relationship is considerably stronger.

Price information from 56 districts was used in the test. Prices were available for a few other districts but were discarded on the grounds of being ambiguous or defective in some other way. An element of judgment necessarily enters here. For example, while an estimate of the average interest rate for the Aran Islands was available,⁷ this was not used. This was because the district of the Aran Islands was contained within the union of Galway. Clearly to relate price on the island markets to the density of traders in an area that not only embraced part of the mainland but also incorporated substantial urban development would be both pointless and misleading. Such an extreme example also illustrates the point on dilution raised earlier. Interest rates were high on the Aran Islands - averaging slightly over 20% per annum - but trader density for its p.l.u. was also high by western standards, reflecting of course the incorporation of the islands within the administrative sphere of the Galway union, and ignoring the fragmentation of markets through physical barriers and isolation. Similarly, though to a less marked extent, variations in trader densities between our 56 districts are muted by the assumption that the density of traders at the p.l.u. level applies unchanged at the district level.

Finally, while acknowledging the fragile nature of the price data, depending as they do on the observations and inquiries of the C.D.B. inspectors, one clear advantage may be noted: because of the rough similarity of conditions in the C.D.B. districts - all were at or under an officially defined poverty line - the complicating influence of variables other than trader density, on local price levels, is reduced.

FOOTNOTES

1. P.T. Bauer and B.S. Yamey, 'Economic Progress and Occupational Distribution', Economic Journal, Dec. 1951; P. Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth 1688-1959 (Cambridge, 1969) pp. 136-7, 155. On the basis of this reasoning it is most probable that Table I conveys a somewhat inflated impression of the increase in trading activity in the final two decades of the nineteenth century.
2. It is also interesting to note, in relation to the overlap between farming and retailing functions, that of the 10,592 persons combining occupation of land and other pursuits at the turn of the century, almost a quarter of these were involved in the shopkeeping or pub trade. Census of Ireland: 1901 : General Report, p. 131.
3. Congested Districts' Board, Inspectors' Local Reports (Base Line Reports) 1892-8 (Dublin, 1898).
4. Micks, letter to the Librarian, Trinity College Dublin, 15 Jan. 1927. The letter is attached to a copy of the Inspectors' Local Reports in the T.C.D. Library.
5. Inspectors' Local Reports (1898), report number 20 (district of Ballyshannon).
6. Ibid., report no. 18 (district of Inver).
7. Ibid., report no. 54 (district of the Aran Islands).

CHAPTER 10

THE IRISH 'GOMBEENMAN'

The gombeenman has come into prominence once again with the recent publication of a paper on the topic by Peter Gibbon and M.D. Higgins.¹ This raises a number of stimulating issues, some of which are obviously germane to the present study since agricultural reformers were keenly interested in the phenomenon. To a considerable extent the criticisms by Gibbon and Higgins re-echo those of Plunkett, Finlay, Russell and others (though it could be argued that the earlier criticisms are more discriminating and more sophisticated). The joint authors pursue their prey - the gombeenman - across the last century of Irish history while the present study is terminated in 1914.² Thus only the pre-1914 elements of their paper are used here, essentially as a focus for the wider discussion of the problem of rural indebtedness and its implications.

According to Gibbon and Higgins³:

The gombeenman of the period 1870-1930 typically exercised economic patronage through credit retailing in combination with moneylending. In order to secure a dependent clientèle he made cash loans and credit freely available to small farmers... Having established dependence, he would then charge inflated retail prices to his customer in order both to secure as much profit as possible and to keep the customer falling further into debt.

However, at no point are the defining characteristics of the gombeenman made clear, and at times the joint authors seem to come close to the position of regarding all traders as gombeenmen.⁴ Not that the definitional point is an easy one, as the Select Committee on Money-lending (1897) long ago discovered.⁵ Admitting to being perplexed in this matter, it expressed its difficulty in distinguishing between legitimate trading in credit and the activities of professional money-lenders which on the whole the committee considered undesirable. Plunkett, described the gombeenman as the local usurer, but this formulation presents the obvious difficulty of determining what rate of interest on credit transactions in money or goods should be considered exorbitant. And this cannot be answered in isolation from such factors as the specific level of risk involved, the price and availability of alternative credit sources and ultimately the incorporation of normative elements into the analysis. In a modern contribution to this debate, however, one might expect a more refined notion of what constitutes usury (or at the very least an appreciation of when the term represents little more than a convenient expression of abuse).

It would be generally accepted, in relation to nineteenth-century Ireland, that exploitative relationships existed between some traders and some clients, and that the frequency of abuse was probably more pronounced at earlier rather than later points in time. It is contended though, that the scale of the problem has been exaggerated, that the complexities of the economic environment have not been fully appreciated, and that evidence has been ignored which indicates erosion of the structural conditions facilitating abuse, even before the turn of the century.

A useful departure point, from which the discussion can be moved backwards in time into the late nineteenth century, is the very comprehensive report on agricultural credit published in 1914.⁶ The

authors, while accepting that much hardship had been caused in the past to smaller farmers (particularly in the west) by the operations of specialist moneylenders, came to the firm conclusion that "gombeenism" in this form had practically disappeared.⁷ Moving further back in time, another official investigation found that contrary to initial expectations, the gombeenman had not only failed to flourish as a result of the transfer of land to tenant purchasers, but was in fact disappearing.⁸ George Russell (A.E.) in evidence before the Select Committee on Moneylending (1898) stated that the gombeenman specialising in the provision of credit had practically vanished because of the pressure of the commercial banks and public opinion.⁹ Another witness P.J. Hannon, an agricultural reformer with first-hand experience of conditions in the west of Ireland, could only provide evidence of three districts where such moneylending at high interest rates still persisted.¹⁰ These witnesses, in line with Gibbon and Higgins, would, however, claim that the old system of "gombeening" was reappearing in new shapes, most notably in the form of credit-retailing. Indeed, the authors of the 1914 report on agricultural credit also entertained some fears along these lines as their description of a gombeenman suggests.¹¹

Generally speaking, a "gombeen" man may be described as a local moneylender, often a shopkeeper, who by advancing money at high interest has so got the necessitous farmers into his grasp as to cripple them with a growing burden of indebtedness and leave them almost helpless victims in his hands. In the cases where "gombeenism" is combined with shopkeeping the debtors are often unable to transfer their custom to another shop, through fear that such a step would be followed by immediate prosecution for the amounts due by them.

The pervasiveness of credit transactions requires little comment, but an interpretation of its implications is less straightforward than some critics seem to have imagined.

We have already drawn upon the evidence contained in the Inspectors' Local Reports to show that fairly extensive areas of high interest rates

were to be found in such counties as Galway, Mayo and Donegal. It is evident though that areas of this kind were concentrated in the mid- and north-west, but interestingly not in the south-west of the country. In other words this experience had a marked regional character. This is not to suggest that some instances of high interest rates might not be encountered in the south-west. The point is the extent of such practices was not noteworthy relative to the dominant pattern of low credit charges there. Nor can other regions of the west be considered homogeneous in terms of high interest charges. One may take two of the previously mentioned counties, Donegal and Galway, to illustrate the contention of a wide dispersion of interest rates. Thus in the districts of "The Rosses" and Glenties (Donegal) and the Aran Islands and Clifden (Galway) charges of 20 per cent or more per annum are reported, while in north Inishowen, in the former county, and Levally, in the latter, credit charges are less than half that amount. In the urban districts in these and other western counties where competitive pressures were more severe than in rural areas one would generally predict low average interest rates. Overall, of the districts on which the CDB inspectors reported, it would seem that roughly a quarter had average interest rates of 10% or less while another quarter or so had rates that did not exceed 15% per annum.¹² (The student of comparative agrarian studies may find it instructive to contrast the CDB evidence with fairly recent data on credit charges in some of today's developing countries - parts of Laos 48 - 120 per cent per annum, parts of rural Hong Kong 120 per cent per annum, and on a lower interest plane, agricultural moneylenders in India frequently charging in excess of 18 per cent per annum.¹³ One can only conclude that the supply of credit in rural Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century compares more than favourably.)

It was observed by contemporaries that high interest charges were

most pronounced in the poorer districts of Ireland, a category of which the CDB areas represent prime examples. If in such extreme cases one cannot find uniformly high charges on a general scale, then by inference, the existence of high interest rates on a massive scale in the less depressed areas is even less plausible. Reflection on structural change in the economy lends further support to this claim. One aspect of this was the strong advance of the retailing sector of the economy in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. Over this period, the numbers of various categories of retailers advanced particularly rapidly in some poor law unions in the west of Ireland, Oughterard, Mount Bellew, Bantry and Dingle for example.

A further crucial development acted on the level of credit prices. This was the extension of the banking system into rural Ireland in the post-Famine period. Thus while nationally there was only one banking office to every 37,600 persons in 1851, there was one to every 8,200 persons by 1891.¹⁴ A complementary development about the turn of the century, the emergence of co-operative credit societies, was important for some distressed areas, especially in Connaught. However, despite the growth of institutional provision farmers and others (as is the case to a lesser extent today) tended to make extensive use of shop credit facilities, even where the interest charges were higher than those advertised by the commercial banks. This apparent paradox is not too difficult to explain. The real cost of bank borrowing was considerably higher than the nominal rate implied. Thus both Horace Plunkett and P.J. Hannon in evidence before the Select Committee on Money-lending (1898) complained that bank credit was poorly attuned to the needs of agriculturalists in that loans had to be renewed every three months or so, each renewal involving further expense.¹⁵ It was customary for borrowers to meet their guarantors' travelling expenses, a duty which was not so narrowly defined as to exclude fairly ample alcoholic

refreshment. In addition, as George Russell pointed out to the Committee:

"There are a great many other things which pile up the expenses. When a man goes surety for his friend he expects that he will work for him occasionally; he is under an obligation to him..."

By imputing values to these associated costs, Russell calculated that the real cost of bank borrowing could on occasion rise to as high as 40 per cent per annum. A figure of this magnitude is no doubt unrepresentative of the general experience, but it brings out forcibly some less obvious features of bank borrowing. Viewed in this light the competitiveness of traders in the supply of credit, in terms of price, convenience and flexibility, is obvious.¹⁶ Indeed it is only fair to recognise that the fall in the cost of borrowing owed much, not only to the extension of the banking system, but also to competition between traders.

Banks were of course also indirect suppliers of credit to the rural population to the extent that they made credit available to traders who in turn transmitted this to clients - frequently to clients who would be rejected outright by the banks as uncreditworthy, yet whose credit needs were sometimes desperate. The comments of Mr. Walker, C.B., a member of the CDB, are apt in this respect:¹⁷

The principal man who is financing the people in the West of Ireland is getting a very bad name - the grocer - but if you take the risks he incurs, I don't think his charges are too high. He lends year after year. He is getting a very bad name, but there is no bank that would lend money to the people he deals with, except at a very high rate of interest. The rate of interest depends upon the security, and there is practically nothing in the way of security to give...

Similarly, a labourer from county Waterford, appearing before the same inquiry, speaks of the difficulty facing people of his class in getting essential credit from any source other than from traders.¹⁸ This reinforces earlier claims by agricultural reformers who stressed the very limited credit opportunities available at the base of rural society.

And it hardly requires emphasising that in some districts where sporadic potato failure in the 1880s and 1890s still meant near-famine conditions, consumption goods on credit were the very stuff of survival.

Credit in a Developing Economy

A general current of suspicion regarding credit provision sometimes pervades writings on the subject - a stream of thought in no sense specific to Ireland (medieval Europe resounded to the thud of debate on the question of usury, in some contemporary developing countries discussion is charged with socio-political and racial considerations). It may well be that the future historiographer of social studies in Ireland will note a certain resurgence of polemical interest in the topic¹⁹ after a previous peak towards the end of the last century. Then the most articulate sources of such critical views were agricultural reformers, such as Horace Plunkett, Fr. Finlay, George Russell, and R.A. Anderson. Whatever may be said of the specific content of some of their views on the supply of credit, and there was some variation in ideas between the critics, it should be recognised that on the whole they appreciated the importance of credit in rural economies. George Russell, whose literary hat fitted more easily than his economist's hat expressed the basic problem with a typical flourish:

"But an income which depends largely on the state of the weather yawns with empty gulfs; it has so many cracks, gaps and fluctuations..." 20

It is also clear that agricultural reformers perceived the difficulties faced by the conventional banking system in servicing the poorer sections of the rural community, and so quite naturally were led to propose innovations along the lines of co-operative credit societies. What they perceived only dimly, if at all, was the local trader's role in lowering information and transaction costs (much as did co-operative societies) in relation to borrowing, thus constituting a more competitive supplier of rural credit than the joint-stock banks in some sectors of the credit

market. Quite clearly local traders were much closer in geographical and social terms to potential borrowers; they were better placed to assess the creditworthiness of the many customers who had little if any security to offer; they appreciated the variability of income flows in a precarious rural economy. Also of course they accepted clients who would be considered too high a risk by the banks. In consequence their interest rates must be evaluated in the light of the specific level of risk involved.

The significance of trader credit may be underlined by reference to some general economic propositions. Creation of a financial infrastructure - money, credit, financial institutions - is vital to economic development, specifically in promoting efficiency in exchange and encouraging further specialisation and production for the market. In a highly developed capital market a variety of specialised institutions and an elaborate price structure co-ordinating the actions of different categories of borrowers and lenders, are present. In the absence of such specialised institutions part-time financial intermediaries, such as traders, perform some of these vital economic functions. Thus the development of trader credit in nineteenth-century Ireland represented, on the whole, a desirable expansion of credit arrangements, and one which, in the absence of more formal provision in some areas of the country, and of the credit market, gave an impulse to economic activity.

In drawing attention to the positive features of credit provision it is not implied that traders as a group, no more than any other occupational group, glowed with altruism. In the absence of strong evidence to the contrary it seems safest to assume that in general they charged at or close to the maximum the market could bear. Exploitative relationships (which should be distinguished from the more prevalent market deficiencies) certainly existed: but it is contended that their scope and incidence cannot have existed on a major scale by the beginning of the present century, given the structural changes in the economy

discussed earlier. Increasing state intervention in the market was a further, but less important factor reducing undesirable practices. As we advance into the twentieth century the high levels of traders performing marketing and distributive functions, and the more complete integration of local markets as transport and information costs declined undermined the bases for monopolistic practices on any substantial scale.

REFERENCES

1. P. Gibbon & M.D. Higgins, 'Patronage, Tradition and Modernisation: The Case of the Irish "Gombeenman"', Economic & Social Review, VI (1974), pp 27-44.
2. The Gibbon-Higgins' thesis is challenged for the longer time period in L. Kennedy, 'A Sceptical View on the Reincarnation of the Irish "Gombeenman"', Economic & Social Review, VIII (1977), pp 213-222. Those fortunate enough not to be afflicted by false consciousness may find the rejoinder more to their liking: Gibbon & Higgins, 'The Irish "Gombeenman": Reincarnation or Rehabilitation?', Economic & Social Review, VIII (1977), pp 313-320.
3. Gibbon & Higgins (1974), p 32.
4. Ibid., p 35.
5. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending (B.P.P., 1897, XI).
6. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (B.P.P., 1914, XIII).
7. Ibid.
8. Inquiry into the Present Condition of Tenant Purchasers under the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Acts: report by W.F. Bailey, legal assistant commissioner under the Land Law (Ireland) Acts (B.P.P., 1903, LVII), p 345.
9. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending (1898), Q.2141.
10. Ibid., Q. 2268.

11. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit (1914), p 87.
12. Note, however, the qualification in an earlier chapter that there is some downward bias in these estimates.
13. R. Firth & B.S. Yamey (eds.), Capital Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies (London, 1964). See the papers by Halpern, Topley, & Hoselitz in this collection.
14. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit (1914), p 35.
15. Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending (B.P.P., 1898, X), QQ. 1930, 2277.
16. It is also true, though, that shop credit sometimes involved further costs such as being tied to a particular outlet or being obliged to accept sub-standard products.
17. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit (1914), Q. 4501. It is only fair to add that Mr. Walker suggests, by implication, that the suppliers of such credit were amply remunerated. It is agreed here that monopoly profits accrued to traders in some districts, particularly in the west, but as has been argued earlier this represented a subsidiary pattern and one which was increasingly under pressure by the turn of the century as local monopolies were progressively undermined.
18. Ibid., Q. 18495.
19. The outstanding embodiment of this unfavourable attitude is the two papers previously cited by Gibbon & Higgins. Though less focused, sections of Brody's Inishkillane exude a similar distaste. See H. Brody, Inishkillane: Change & Decline in the West of Ireland (Middlesex, 1974). It is, however, in some areas of current political writing of a polemical nature that the gombeen label seems to be enjoying special popularity. Even the world of theatre has benefited from the elastic quality of this stigmatising term. Note the recent play by Mr. & Mrs. Arden entitled 'The Ballygombeen Bequest'.
20. George Russell, Co-operation and Nationality, p. 12.

CHAPTER 11

THE IRISH RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE : ELEMENTS OF STABILITY AND CHANGE 1880-1914

An introductory note, setting out the scope of this final chapter, may be helpful. Essentially this is an essay which, while not summarising earlier chapters, seeks to use our previous analysis as a base from which to develop a number of generalisations about rural society. In that it attempts to weave into a coherent pattern some of the principal economic, sociological, and political themes that have arisen in the course of this study it might be loosely regarded as constituting a model. However the description "analytical essay" is probably more correct (and is preferred by the writer).

Inevitably there is some overlap with previous chapters. Sometimes this consists of a summary of earlier arguments; other times additional empirical evidence is introduced. In relation to the latter, for example, some further instances of conflict between traders and co-operators are cited. These supplement earlier information on this issue and, while not adding fresh insights, it is felt that the inclusion of further illustrative material is worthwhile. As Irish historians (but not novelists) have largely neglected the trader there seems to be further value in drawing attention to source material that may contribute towards remedying this deficiency in Irish historiography.

The essay may be divided into two parts: the first and longer section concentrating on areas of conflict in rural Ireland - confrontations between landlords and tenants, stresses in farmer - labourer relations, social discord associated with the spread of co-operation - while the second identifies some of the integrative mechanisms at work in rural society. In treating the latter there is, perhaps, some danger of appearing to lend support to static

functionalist analyses of rural societies. This is not my intention and I would reject such a theoretical orientation. Rural Ireland - at the level of family, community and economy - was subject to continuous change of a qualitative nature over broad time periods. This was not as a result of social revolutionary convulsions within the indigenous social structures, but largely under the impact of the gales of modern capitalism that swept this small extremity of the international market system. The steady cumulative effect of these dynamic, though anonymous processes is best appreciated from later vantage points in time. The theme of rural decline has been treated by a number of recent writers and requires no special elaboration here.¹

Finally, as this chapter seeks to encompass a broad range of themes and order them in relation to each other, it will be understood that such a sketch of the rural social structure is of a fairly tentative kind. It may be hoped though that it has some value both as a provisional structure and as a source of further hypotheses about Irish rural society.

While it is misleading to speak of a homogenous society beneath the brittle crust of the landed ascendancy, it is important to note that two factors in particular simplified its social composition. By the turn of the century the rural economy rested largely on agriculture. The secular decline of rural crafts and industries throughout the 19th century narrowed the base of rural economic activity, in effect promoting the agriculturalisation of rural Ireland. It still comes as somewhat of a shock in looking back over that century to realise that at its inception substantial numbers in the rural labour force derived their livelihood, in whole or in part, from non-farming activities. The west of Ireland provides an extreme illustration. It was estimated in 1908 that 90% of the population in congested areas lived on agricultural holdings, income being supplemented by secondary sources, in many cases migratory labour in Britain². Yet early in the previous century the domestic textiles industry represented an important source of employment in areas of the western counties that now fell within the jurisdiction of the Congested Districts Board. Prior to the Great Famine industrial decline had been most noteworthy in the textiles industry and even as late as 1841, the census of that year records one in four occupied persons as connected with textiles. In the post-Famine period the decay of domestic industry, scattered widely throughout Ireland, proceeded on a wider front. The impact of the decline in textiles had been most severely felt in rural Ireland and this was now accentuated by the collapse of local enterprises based on agricultural produce - brewing, distilling, tanning. Similarly the ranks of independent craftsmen were progressively thinned out under intense competition from mass produced products. Traditional or new industry, where it succeeded in absorbing the shockwaves of British and world competition, tended to concentrate in a few favoured growth areas, most particularly the Lagan Valley and Dublin. Thus rural Ireland - peripheral in economic and geographical

terms to the powercentres of modern industrial capitalism - was swung towards specialisation in primary (agricultural) commodities, with attendant consequences for occupational and class structure.

The second powerful factor contributing to a simplification of the social composition of rural society was the destruction of the large rural proletariat of cottiers and labourers under the impact of the Great Famine and its aftermath. The general labour supply fell dramatically in the immediate period of famine conditions, and less rapidly but persistently thereafter.³ However, the main incidence of emigration was among landless and small-holding groups, so diminishing their numerical significance in both absolute and relative terms. Thus the numbers of labourers fell from perhaps 700,000 in 1845 to 300,000 in 1910, while cottiers (on holdings of less than five acres) suffered an even sharper drop from roughly 300,000 to a level less than a quarter of that over the same interval. And while the total number of farm holdings declined, those above thirty acres in size consolidated their position by showing a slight upward tendency in the half century following the Great Famine.⁴

Not all social categories were declining in numerical significance throughout the second half of the 19th century. With the expansion of the services sector of the economy new or hitherto relatively unimportant occupational groups developed. Among these one might mention bank clerks, doctors, veterinary surgeons, schoolteachers, post office and railway employees, and various administrators.⁵ More important in the present context was the development of the distribution system, particularly the expansion of retail outlets in rural Ireland in the periods of agricultural prosperity after the mid-century. Moving up to our chosen period, one finds that persons performing agricultural marketing and retailing functions in rural Ireland continued to increase in relative strength over the period 1881-1911.⁶ Another, and an especially noteworthy change in the occupational structure was the long term trend for the

Roman Catholic (R.C.) clergy to expand in both relative and absolute terms. From a base of about 5,000 priests, monks and nuns in 1850 clerical numbers increased steadily to over 14,000 in 1900, despite a heavy fall in the lay R.C. population.⁷

It is clear from this summary account of occupational trends in the second half of the nineteenth century that occupiers of land were coming to dominate even further the ranks of an ever dwindling rural population. The numbers of rural labourers were progressively depleted, while non-farming but strategically significant groups in rural Ireland - traders and the R.C. clergy - represented rising social forces. However an analysis developed solely in terms of a restructuring of the labour force, while having the merit of being amenable to quantification, tends to miss underlying dynamic processes. In itself it gives little indication of how various social groupings relate to each other; what forms of social conflict are present; what factors govern collective behaviour; and how communities maintain stability in the face of pressures towards change. This essay, using the structural data as a set of preliminary guidelines, addresses itself to the problems posed by these interrelated themes.

The basic strategy adopted is one of observing the social structure over a period of time when it was subjected to new and unconventional forms of stress. This approach - following in the wake of some socially disruptive thrust - should be instrumental in revealing some of the internal workings of rural society. And conveniently from the point of view of analysis, one radically new force in the quarter century before the Great War was the rise of the agricultural co-operative movement. From a feeble presence of a few dozen dairy co-operatives in the early 1890s it had developed by 1914 to embrace a membership of over 100,000 persons (mainly farmers with a sprinkling of labourers) organised in roughly a thousand dairy, agricultural, credit and miscellaneous societies.

Aspects of land agitations and attempts at organisation by farm labourers are also incorporated into the present essay, but the special value of co-operation in furnishing a window on rural society is the unique character of the alliances and tensions it engendered. For this reason it throws an unusual light across rural Ireland, one in which social relationships and group orientations emerge in stronger relief.

Early Response to the Formation of Co-operatives

The early co-operative pioneers, Horace Plunkett, R.A. Anderson, Lord Monteagle had to contend with much apathy and indifference from the farmers and labourers they sought to involve in co-operative stores, creameries and credit societies. Plunkett claims that over 50 meetings were held before a single co-operative society was formed.⁸ The response of some rural traders - suppliers of agricultural inputs and various consumer goods, and buyers of agricultural outputs - was more specific, and probably more determined. The first co-operative society formed at Doneraile, near Old Court, induced a hostile reaction from local traders and the new society was subjected to boycotting - a form of control mechanism that had been perfected over the previous decade in agrarian agitations.⁹ Some Mallow traders, banded together as the Mallow Traders' Protection Association resolved:¹⁰

That we, the traders of Mallow, enter our most solemn protest against the establishment of co-operative stores at Lombardstown and Mourneabbey in opposition to the legitimate traders of the town, and condemn the gross ingratitude of the farmers who have joined hands with their enemies and their country against their tried and trusted friends. We pledge by every means in our power to help one another to fight the unjust alliance ... which tried to destroy our trade and will eventually bring ruin to the farmers themselves.

This resolution has wider significance in that it embraces the main points used by traders and sympathetic newspaper editors in attacking co-operation. It may, therefore, be instructive to isolate and make explicit the main strands of the argument. First: the adoption of marketing and distributive functions by groups of farmers or labourers was at variance with the prevailing value system. Second: co-operation was unpatriotic and involved collusion with traditional enemies - landlords and unionists. Thus co-operation was interpreted as a deep laid scheme to push up rents or deflect nationalists from the pursuit of Home Rule. Third: co-operative endeavours were narrowly self-interested, and

treacherous to the extent that traders' past services in agrarian struggle and the provision of credit were being forgotten. Finally and most importantly, co-operative enterprise would involve considerable economic losses for traders, and ultimately for agriculturalists themselves.¹¹

Passing motions is not the most effective form of struggle. Faced with the threat of a co-operative store Longford town traders insisted that the rule which prohibited them from holding positions on the management committee should be rescinded. One disputant demanded that traders be given a majority on the committee to ensure the co-operative society did not enter controversial lines of business.¹² After considerable discussion the offending rule was deleted and traders admitted. The chief co-operative organiser, R.A. Anderson, later claimed that in most instances where traders were admitted as shareholders they dominated policy making: "Henceforth, except for dairying, co-operation was ruled out in that area".¹³

In mid-Tipperary the formation of co-operative stores provoked the organisation of a Thurles Traders' Protection Association while farther north in that county the traders of Nenagh and surrounding villages were distinctly uneasy.¹⁴ Just over a decade later traders in Donegal were organising, unsuccessfully, to crush the embryonic co-operative development in Templecrone.¹⁵ In County Waterford the Waterford Pig Dealers' Association brought pressure to bear on local M.P. and leader of the Parnellite wing of the Irish nationalists, John Redmond, urging him to dissociate himself from attempts to establish bacon curing stores of a co-operative type.¹⁶ As late as 1911 Plunkett feared that the future of the co-operative movement was being threatened by its "premature invasion of the groceryman's preserves",¹⁷ while a year later an official co-operative publication speaks of the deep split which "threatens to divide the farmers and traders of the country into two opposite camps".¹⁸¹⁹

Overall then, while there is some variation in the response to co-operation - purely dairy processing or credit provision being more acceptable than forms which embodied retailing activities - a substantial degree of uniformity in the structure of co-operator and trader relationships is apparent at different points in time and space.²⁰

An interesting facet of some of the attacks on co-operation is the overlap of political and trader objections (in itself suggestive of the political influence of traders). Thus while there is a comparative decline in the number of reported instances of trader-farmer conflict in the early years of the new century, with the fall of the Unionist administration in 1905 and the subsequent ejection of Plunkett from the powerful position of vice-president of the Dept. of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, political and trader opposition to co-operation is articulated with a new vigour. It is unnecessary to summarise the ongoing public debate here, but a few major strands may be recalled. Towards the end of 1906 the central organising body of the co-operative movement, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, finding itself under increasing attack in the Freeman's Journal and other major nationalist newspapers, felt it necessary to appeal to its constituent societies for testimony regarding its non-political character. The societies responded by affirming the non-political nature of the co-operative movement as well as endorsing the value of the work undertaken by the I.A.O.S.²¹ Such gestures however did little to placate the opponents of the movement who persisted in regarding it variously as an anti-nationalist front, "a buttress of the toppling institution of landlordism", and a "cruel attack on traders". Unfortunately for co-operators, prominent among their critics was the new vice-president of D.A.T.I.

T.W. Russell M.P. Having received a delegation of traders protesting against D.A.T.I.'s policy of subsidising co-operative organisation, Russell quickly proceeded to phase out over a period of three years his department's grant to the I.A.O.S.²² (In fact the grant was ended abruptly in 1908 following a sharp press controversy centering on allegations by the writer and co-operator T.W. Rolleston that the Irish parliamentary party was dominated by country traders who, it was claimed, used political power to stunt co-operative growth).²³ Rather than subsidising, such controversies, frequently combining elements of political and trader opposition, rolled on until the outbreak of the Great War, and even beyond.

The response of another social group, the R.C. clergy to the co-operative movement has been dealt with in some detail in an earlier chapter. The reaction may be briefly summarised: in the early days of co-operative propagation many of the R.C. clergy held aloof from the movement, and in some instances actually opposed its diffusion, sometimes it would appear in conjunction with traders. As the movement developed there is evidence of increasing clerical participation. Indeed where co-operative societies were successfully organised there was almost inevitably a clerical presence.

While the numbers of R.C. clergy present at co-operative meetings in the early 1890s may not have been particularly great, their relative absence at meetings of labourers' associations is far more remarkable. Studying newspapers and other contemporary accounts in the closing decades of the century one cannot avoid noticing the prominence of priests on public platforms relating to either tenant demonstrations or nationalist meetings. One report may be taken as pretty representative.²⁴ Under the sub-headings "Nationalist Demonstration at New Pallas" and "A Vigorous Protest from Priests and People" the paper reports: "At the head of each contingent walked their parish priest, and previous to the

meeting the march past of each body was a sight not easily to be forgotten". According to Rev. Fr. O'Dwyer P.P.: "They were there as one man, priest and people, foot to foot and breast to breast, prepared to strike a fresh and telling blow in the sacred cause of Irish Nationality". This is all quite unexceptional.

However, out of step with this flowing martial scene and professed solidarity one finds priests very poorly represented or largely absent at public meetings of labourers' associations. At a "monster meeting" of the representatives of the trades and labourers of Skibbereen in 1894 only one priest is reported as being present.²⁵ He in fact was asked to preside, and he mentions perhaps significantly that he was there "with the sanction and authority of his Bishop". A Fr. M'Swiney presided over meetings of the Enniskean (Co. Cork) branch of the Democratic Labour Federation. It is worth noting that in reference to Fr. M'Swiney the president of the Bandon branch of the federation claimed he was "the only priest in Ireland who had come forward to champion the cause of the workingman".²⁶ This is undoubtedly an exaggeration but it strongly suggests a general tendency.

Occasionally the absence or poor turn-out of clergy is explicitly noted, as in a report of a labour meeting (addressed by Michael Davitt) carried by the unionist Cork Constitution 22 Jan. 1890. No clergy are reported as present at a public meeting organised by Limerick Trades Council in 1894,²⁷ nor in the case of 7 meetings of the Bandon branch of the I.D.L.F. as reported in the Eagle and County Cork Advertiser during that year. A similar absence may be noted in the case of reports in the Eagle of a labour conference at Limerick Junction (18 Aug. '94) and a labourers' meeting at Kanturk (22 Sept. '94). At a meeting of the Land and Labour Association in New Tipperary a few years later letters of apology from two clergymen who are unable to attend constitute the only reference to the clergy.²⁸

How does one explain such differential participation on the part of the clergy as between tenant and nationalist agitations on the one hand, and labourer meetings on the other? This behavioural feature is probably explicable by reference to two broad considerations, each in its own way quite suggestive on the structure of rural society. These are the system of social stratification and the nature of the socio-political demands being articulated. In relation to the first of these, the priest a prestigious, well-heeled, powerful figure was elevated through his office to a social plane far above that of the struggling labourer. Secular as well as spiritual power emanated from the dark cassock; priestly authority was confirmed in a traditional milieu in which sentiments of deference, affection, and sometimes fear commingled.²⁹ While kinship ties tend to reduce social distance it is inconceivable (given a society that practised endogamy within narrow income ranges) that such links between the clerical elite and the labourers were nearly so dense as with other rural social groups such as the tenant farmers for instance.³⁰ "For, let the clergy say what they will about their being the poor man's friends, as they are; they do not spring from the labouring class, nor do they sympathise with labourers so much as with farmers and other employers of labour."³¹ These factors suggest that a spontaneous identification with the position of the labourer is not immediately probable.

More significant in determining clerical reaction, one suspects, were the implications of some of the labourers' demands, particularly when these are viewed in the context of a general presumption against social radicalism within Catholic Ireland.³² Dissatisfaction with conditions of employment, requests for larger allotments, or calls for division of large farms tended to draw labourers into conflict with farmers, thus threatening the stability of local communities. (In this respect, that

is, in terms of their disruptive content there are some similarities between the impact of co-operative organisation and that of labourers' organisations.) At labourers' meetings one finds that the spokesmen are sometimes very critical of farmers' treatment of men of their class.³³ Certainly a strong sense of class distinction separated labourers from other social strata, even the humblest tenant farmers.³⁴ Anderson recalls that farmers and labourers were "often, unhappily antagonistic", while an official enquiry into agricultural credit noted in passing the social gulf separating the two. Other contemporary observers commented on this phenomenon, while the Royal Commission on Labour (1893-4) found considerable regional variation in the warmth of farmer-labourer relations.³⁵

However, like other movements of this period, those of the labourer were not free from the weight of Irish history; the problems of ordering economic and political priorities and of satisfactorily relating the economic to the political dimension were ever present. In the case of largely tenant agitations this dual aspect could be a source of strength, "the question of independence joined to the land question would be like a railway carriage coupled to an engine".³⁶ For the landless man, also occupying a seat on the national train, it is not so clear that the same destination was necessarily the most suitable. The problems of political life in the third class compartment are illustrated by the proceedings at a labourers' meeting in Nenagh in 1894.³⁷ One of the principal speakers makes the double claim that (a) the labourers have a "right to be rooted in the Irish soil", and (b) that the labourers "were as patriotic as any other class in the country" and "would stand by the National cause come weal or woe". Another speaker advised that the "cause of the labourers would not be finally settled until the cause of Ireland was settled and legislation for the labourers as well as for every other class would come, not from an alien Parliament, but from a

native Government in College Green". This is a classic reminder of the type of confusion of economic and political strategies that impeded the development of a strong class consciousness, and also incidentally the work of rural reformers. Essentially it illustrates the latent function of Irish nationalism in obscuring class antagonisms.³⁸

From these various observations, it is evident that labourers constituted the bottom layer of the rural social pyramid, disadvantaged according to the three classic indices of inequality, economic status, prestige, and power. Above these were the tenant farmers beginning to enjoy increasing prosperity with the recovery of agricultural prices in the 1890s, and further fortified by favourable adjustments to the system of land tenure. And deeply significant for the prestige system of rural society, the tenant farmer was in possession of the primary means of production, the land, thus further marking him off from the landless class.

Whether one presumes to treat the town and village based traders as part of a separate class or not there is some evidence to suggest that at least the stronger traders enjoyed a position of considerable status and in some instances economic pre-eminence within rural communities.³⁹ Certainly this is the impression conveyed in Paddy Gallagher's description of social conditions in the Rosses, Co. Donegal. Other works previously cited, such as those by R.A. Anderson and Smith-Gordon and Staples express a similar point of view. The more detached observations of officials of the Congested Districts Board also suggest that this interpretation is valid for some districts in the west of Ireland.⁴⁰ It is remarkable that at a later period (early 1930s) Arensberg noted the dowry claimed by shopkeepers was roughly double that claimed by farmers in his west Clare study area.⁴¹ As one of the purposes of the dowry was to iron out inequalities of an economic or prestige nature, the inference of a superior status for traders is afforded some

support. However these observations are concentrated almost wholly in certain counties in the west of Ireland, indicating their regional rather than national significance. They would appear to apply with most strength to the north west region, with diminished strength in other depressed areas, and very probably not at all in the commercial farming areas where a more differentiated economic structure threw up both farming and trading businesses of varying sizes.

However the strategic position of traders in rural life must not be played down. In addition to forming nodal points in the economic network that linked local communities to the outside world, there is fairly strong evidence pointing to a disproportionate accretion of political influence on the part of trading interests from at least the late nineteenth century onwards.⁴² (The two spheres of activity are probably connected: trading links, in so far as they required involvement in a chain of contacts which extended upwards out of the local setting facilitated a consciousness of wider issues and opportunities that is likely to have exceeded that of farmers and labourers.) Of more than tangential relevance here is Clark's quantitative analysis of the social composition of the National Land League in the early 1880s.⁴³

He finds shopkeepers, innkeepers and publicans involved in this mass agrarian movement to a greater extent than their relative numbers in the population would initially suggest.⁴⁴ Clark goes further and ascribes a crucial leadership role to various traders, journalists, and other non-farming groups in politicising the rural masses and shaping the final confrontation with Irish landlordism.

The foregoing suggests that traders were differentiated according to a number of characteristics from other social groups in rural Ireland. In objective terms, they bore a particular relationship to the production process which was both strategic and distinctive. A subjective correlate of this appears to be a heightened political awareness (relative to the

tenant masses), and a greater ability to mobilise in defence of their interests as exemplified by their defensive reaction to agricultural co-operation. In terms of a conflict model of society, it might be said that in the aggregate traders' interests diverged from those of other groups. The historical evidence is conclusive in indicating that a considerable section of traders saw themselves in a conflict relationship with the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class and occasionally (although on a much smaller scale) with farmers. In other words, groups engaged in broadly retailing and marketing activities - those we have labelled traders - formed part of a social class distinct from that of the peasantry and labourers. However such a tidy categorisation presents difficulties. Later when we come to consider the integrative forces at work in rural communities it emerges that the fit between the empirical data and the analytical concept of social class is not as close as one might wish. And, it may be added, viewing the mass of tenant farmers through the prism of social class is also problematic.

We have looked at the response of traders and Roman Catholic clergy to co-operation, and in the process referred briefly to the position of the agricultural labourer. It remains to examine the reaction of a particularly interesting stratum of society, that composed of landlords, land agents and others broadly identified with the ascendancy class. However rural Ireland, to invert Tawney's observation on neighbouring England, lacked "the sentimental aroma of an aristocratic legend" that might soften perceptions of the major class division. Yet despite a background of agrarian turmoil - boycotts, shootings, rent strikes - the initial impulse towards co-operation came almost exclusively from Protestant and unionist reformers. And while the bulk of unionists were probably indifferent to the new social movement, it is nonetheless clear that such elements were disproportionately represented on the I.A.O.S., the co-ordinating body of the movement. Even more important perhaps, to the

extent that the I.A.O.S. was privately financed these funds came mainly from the pocket of peer rather than peasant.

Patterns of Social Conflict

Having identified the varying responses to agricultural co-operation it may be helpful at this stage to summarise the various strands of information in a form which highlights the structured nature of interaction between the major social groups. Reference to figure I provides an overview, necessarily somewhat simplified of the general orientations of the principal social groups vis-a-vis each other at the point of introduction of co-operatives into rural society. The essential simplicity of the pattern is noteworthy. With the exception of the agricultural labourers who are represented as being less well integrated into community life, and an increasingly anachronistic element the landlord class, the other main categories overlap. These overlapping sets indicate common kinship, political and religious affiliations. Economic relationships are perceived as essentially symbiotic within the rural community; opposition to the alien institutions of landlordism and the civil authorities reinforcing this perception of mutual interdependence. The exception once again is the agricultural labourer who intermittently perceived his economic relationship in a less harmonious light.

Figure 1. Traditional Patterns of Group Conflict and Solidarity.

----- indicates a conflict element
in the relationship.

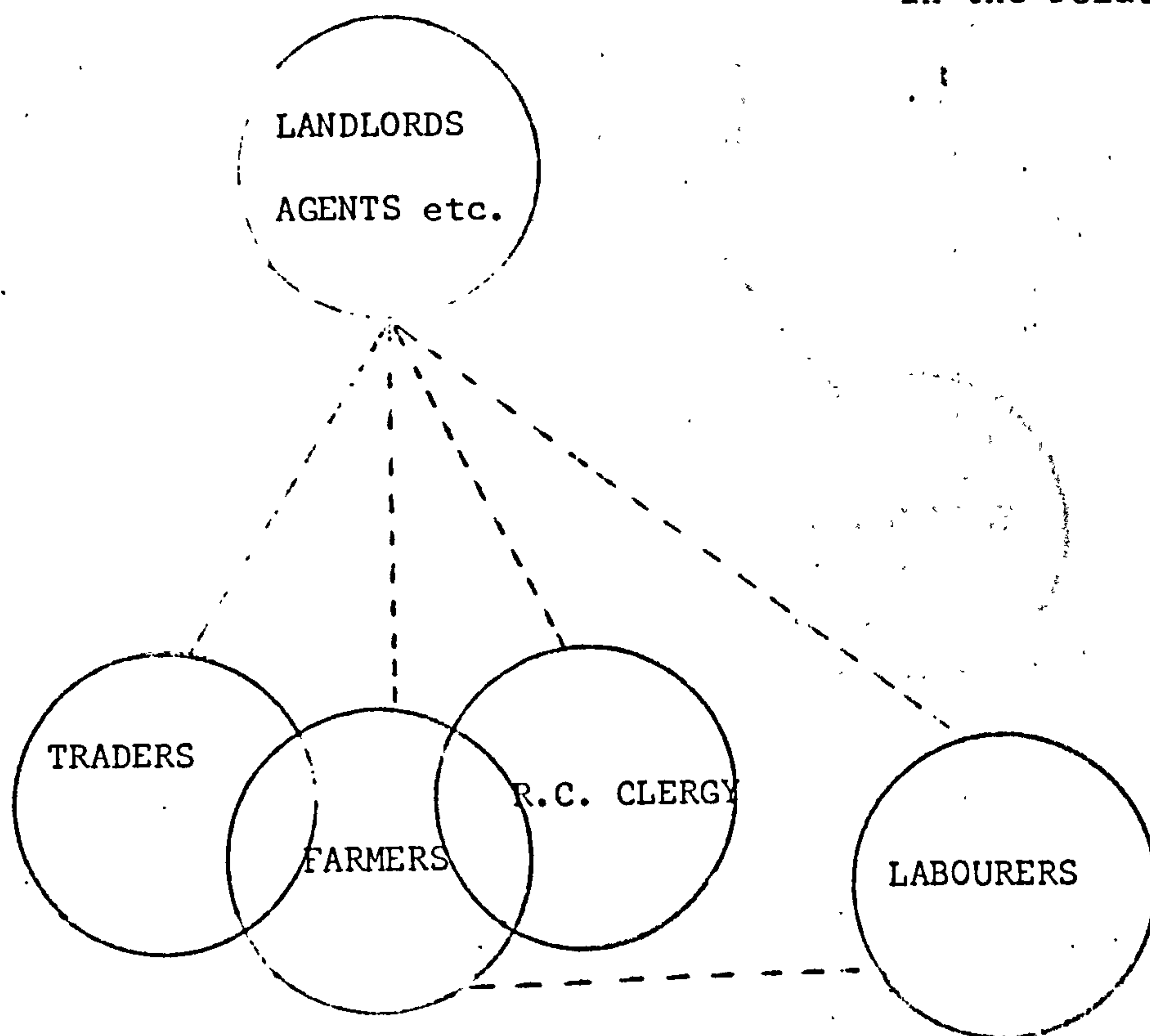
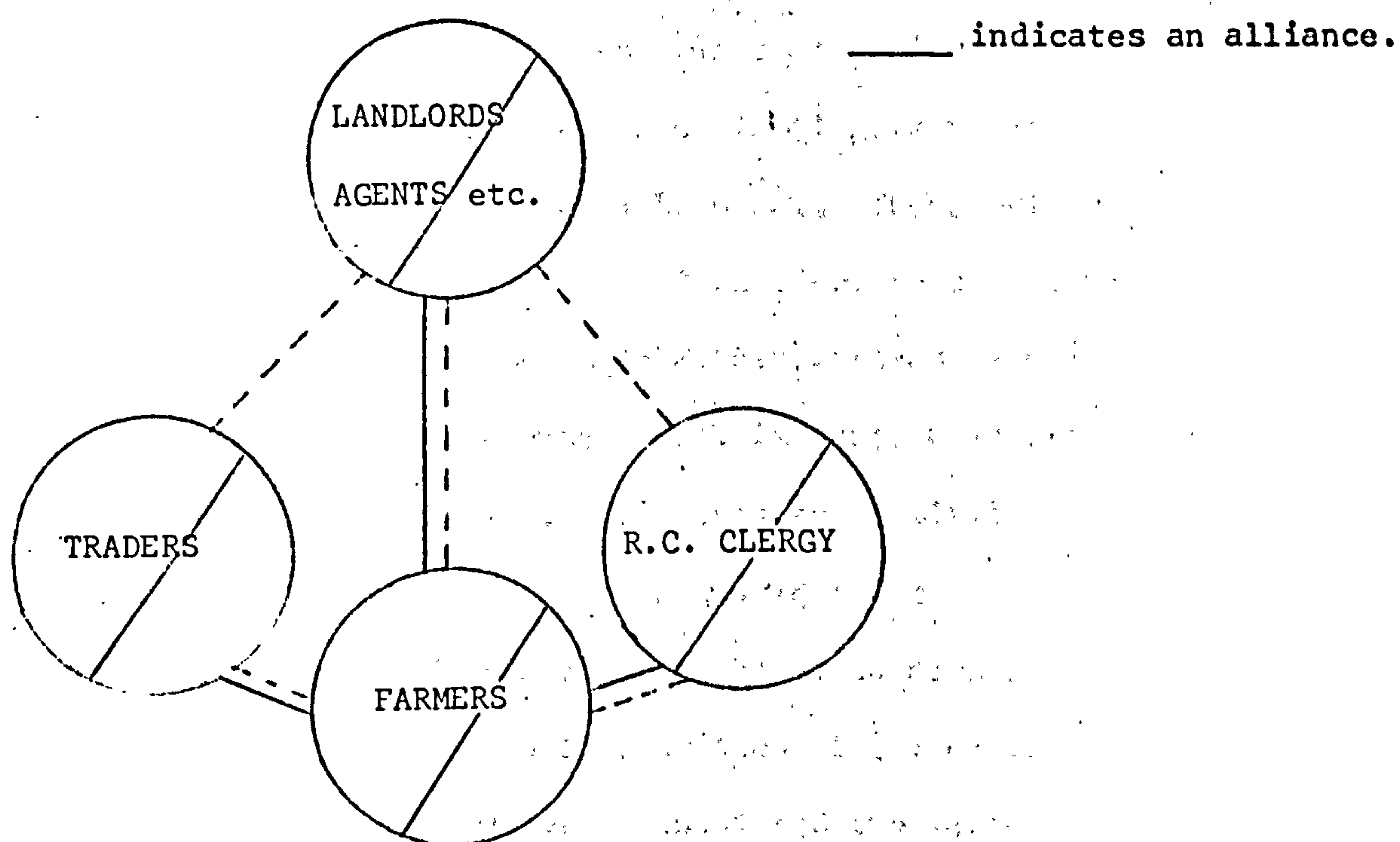


Figure II indicates, again in somewhat crude form, an interesting transitional stage when time-worn patterns of solidarity and conflict are being pressurised by the operation of new forces. We have chosen to focus on that aspect of the historical process which relates to stresses induced by agricultural co-operation though, to anticipate slightly, other forces with potentially similar implications for the cohesion of the traditional social structure were also at work.

Figure 2. Complex Patterns of alliances and conflicts under the impact of an exogenous factor - agricultural co-operation.



Divisions within the major social groups are evident. Thus, for example, within the R.C. clergy some favoured the co-operative movement; others might discourage all, or more likely parts of its programme. Similarly for other groups. No attempt is made here to represent the relative proportions within a group showing positive or negative reactions. A further interesting feature of the pattern shown in figure II is ties tending to cross-cut increasingly dominant group loyalties. Incidentally rural labourers have been omitted from the figure, a simplification which seems justified in view of their peripheral significance in relation to the issue of co-operation.

Agricultural co-operation exposed certain latent conflicts in rural society, contributed to some partial re-alignment between largely antagonistic groupings, and in the process opened up some new lines of conflict. This represents a far more complex historical sequence with divisions apparent within formerly fairly monolithic structures. These developments should be superimposed on the broader historical context:

stretched over the last decade of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century is a web of initiatives - formation of the Congested Districts Board and the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, democratisation of local government, the Dunraven land conference, the Wyndham Land Act. These reform measures were variously blessed as instances of "constructive unionism" or cursed as ploys designed to compromise Mother Ireland in her quest for Home Rule.⁴⁵ The co-operative movement was, in part, a manifestation of the spirit of conciliatory unionism, (though the enlisting of landlords, landagents, and other substantial unionists in the cause of co-operation was less narrowly motivated than some of the above measures and partook more of commitment to a rural philosophy than of policy improvisation). A fuller treatment of ameliorative unionism and the various endeavours of rural reformers, both nationalist and unionist, lies outside the scope of this essay but it is necessary at the very least to stress the transient character of these developments in terms of their political and constitutional impact. A new era entailing a radical break with set historical positions did not dawn, for if the foregoing is to be seen in true perspective then the ultimate failure to bridge the deep-seated division of Irish society must be recognised.⁴⁶ A possible corollary of this is that threatened divisions within this predominantly rural society did not achieve a permanence and an intensity which might have culminated in the emergence of antagonistic class formations. Why this was unlikely to happen is important to an understanding of the underlying dynamics of rural society.

Certainly in some villages, small towns, and their associated hinterlands a legacy of distrust and ill-feeling between some traders and some co-operators persisted long into the present century.⁴⁷ This in itself is an indication of the considerable significance of the early struggles. However it would be quite misleading to suggest, despite

the intensity of some local disputes and the sporadic ideological promptings of the I.A.O.S., that a generalised belief emerged which re-defined the relationship between traders and farmers as essentially exploitative. Certainly no new socio-political institutions emerged which might reflect such a consciousness. Localised grievance or alleged grievance was never successfully subsumed under a social programme that might have induced radical changes in the representation of farming interests and the articulation of their demands. While the claim was sometimes made by leading co-operators that the interests of agriculturalists were neglected by nationalist politicians and that independent organised action was necessary,⁴⁸ it is clear that most agriculturalists were unreceptive to the charge and its implications.

PROBLEMS OF PEASANT POLITICAL ACTION

This brings us directly to consideration within the Irish context of an issue which has perplexed a number of social analysts from Marx onwards.⁴⁹ Do the peasantry constitute a class? The position taken here is that adopted by Shanin.⁵⁰ No neat classification of universal validity can be enforced; the extent to which a peasantry may be viewed as a class can only be established by reference to a specific historical context. Thus while the intermittent character of Irish agrarian upsurges must be recognised, it does seem reasonable to regard the Irish peasantry as behaving as a class like entity during the period of the Land League and related agitations. The conflict relationship with the landlord class and its representatives intensified and a widespread pattern of struggle developed. A nationwide organisational structure and a national leadership shaped the course of this struggle, drawing together the geographically isolated peasant elements. Why were these farmers exhibiting pronounced class characteristics over this period but not

at later points in time?

While ameliorative measures from Westminster and gradual recovery in the rural economy carry the heaviest explanatory weight, a further factor may be relevant. Crucial to socio-political action on behalf of Irish tenant farmers was the participation not only of labourers, but also of non-farming groups such as clergymen, traders, journalists and others.⁵¹ Thus while it has been remarked with some justification that with the Land League the Irish masses came on stage for the first time,⁵² it might also be added that the main speaking parts were reserved for others. Further the land agitation successfully fused political and economic objectives thus locating itself in the mainstream of the historic struggle between nationalism and unionism (this being also true of the United Irish League agitation at the end of the nineteenth century which marked the final phase of militant peasant action on a mass scale). Divorced from this context, denied the supportive action of non-farming elements independent class action of an overt kind was highly improbable.⁵³ Thus in the aftermath of the agrarian struggles there is a rapid decline of class like characteristics on the part of the Irish peasantry.

A momentary look beyond Ireland may be helpful. Reflecting on a range of peasant societies in different parts of the world, Wolfe comments on certain socio-political weaknesses associated with the peasantry - problems of leadership, mobilisation, ideology.⁵⁴ The Irish experience is compatible with these broad generalisations, provided one restricts the frame of reference to open agrarian struggles conducted on a regional or national scale. The strength of the Irish peasantry in regulating landlord-tenant relationships through the mechanism of semi-spontaneous, localised violence must also be firmly recognised.

It is not altogether surprising then that the efforts of co-operative propagandists to forge a new consciousness based on a presumed conflict of interest between farmers and certain commercial interests failed. This is not meant to convey the impression that a central concern of such co-operators was the promotion of social conflict. Rather it was incidental to the main objective of maximising the welfare of agriculturalists i.e. farmers and rural labourers. It sprang from two premises, first a negative evaluation of the performance of traders in servicing rural communities,⁵⁵ and second, a realisation well attested to in practice that co-operatives in seeking to displace certain established forms of trading would inevitably induce a hostile reaction from affected interests. Leading co-operators were especially incensed by the ability of these interests to mobilise political forces on their behalf, and some, most notably Anderson relished the prospect of a head-on clash with traders.⁵⁶ The view that prevailed though was one more sensitive to the social constraints on co-operative development.⁵⁷ Fr. Finlay, vice-president of the I.A.O.S. from its inauguration in 1894 through the whole period of the present study, emphasises the mellowness of the co-operative vision: "The idea of a war of classes is wholly alien to our movement, which, of its nature, makes for social and economic peace".⁵⁸ However Fr. Finlay was not averse to breaking a few heads along the way to the social millennium, as his references to trading interests in the early issues of the Irish Homestead testify. So, what are the most appropriate terms in which to conceptualise the social discord accompanying the progress of co-operation? If it is not primarily an expression of class conflict, then what? And what kind of restructuring of the social and political framework were the reformers seeking to effect?

An immanent feature of the Irish co-operative philosophy was the notion that, because of their disorganised state, agricultural interests were insufficiently safeguarded. This, of course, was a ready extension

of the belief that non-farming, sometimes hostile groups were over-represented in the political system. Finlay speaks of the need for farmers to represent other farmers in public life; George Russell and R.A. Anderson both advocate a form of farmers' trade union; Plunkett urges on agriculturalists the necessity to organise to defend themselves against groups antagonistic to their interests.⁵⁹ A contemporary observer predicted:⁶⁰

"We can see, too, that the spread of co-operation in an agricultural country such as Ireland will tend to produce a division of parties along new lines. There will be a party of farmers - an agrarian party - seeking to enable the agricultural interest to buy and sell directly; and there will be a party of traders or middlemen, seeking to protect the trading interest against the competition of co-operative agricultural societies. This, it has been prophesied, will be the line of division in the Irish Parliament of the future."

But the co-operative pioneers did not advocate a farmer or peasant party.⁶¹ The co-operative movement was determinedly not party political; it took the existing party formations as given. Even when under severe attack from politicians and others, a proposal by one exasperated co-operator that the 100,000 odd farmers in co-operative societies should set up a new political grouping was quickly withdrawn.⁶² What the founders of the movement did propose though was a strong national organisation representing the interests of agriculturalists qua agriculturalists, and acting as a watchdog in relation to public policy impinging on agriculture. Of the many expressions of this view one may note in particular a motion carried unanimously at the annual general meeting of the I.A.O.S. in 1910. This proposed that parliamentary candidates for rural constituencies be required to "recognise and support the claim of the I.A.O.S., the central Union of the organised farmers of Ireland, to be consulted as to the making and administration of any laws which may affect the business of the 95,000 farmers included in the societies which it has founded."⁶³ In the same year Plunkett urged the formation of

an agricultural lobby in parliament open to members of all parties.⁶⁴ This proposal also had the complete backing of the I.A.O.S. What we are seeing then - at the level of the movement as a whole, and in particular in relation to its organisational and ideological core, the I.A.O.S. - is an attempt to ease the frozen postures of Irish political life and create space for interest group politics.⁶⁵ As a mode of expressing agrarian grievances this represents the first serious development of such mechanisms in the history of Irish agriculture. Even more remarkable this occurs little over a decade after the impassioned national and class confrontations of the Land League period and within the temporal context of further land agitations. Transmutation of these crude patterns into the form of specialist pressure group activities may be viewed as part of the political modernisation process. But having acknowledged these incipient developments it must be stressed that, apart from some limited successes, interest group politics failed to flourish in the shadow of the struggling giants of unionism and nationalism.⁶⁶ (Nor was the situation transformed with the advent of political independence; the two largest farmers' unions to emerge, the National Farmers Association and the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association were post-World War II developments.)

Prior to independence, two major retarding factors may be identified. The first relates to the monolithic structure of the Irish political system prior to 1918. In a perceptive editorial in the Irish Homestead soon after the first General Election of 1910, George Russell laments the difficulty experienced by the "submerged Irish causes" - Gaelic League, co-operative movement, Sinn Fein, Labour League - in bringing pressure to bear on members of parliament.⁶⁷ Outside of Ulster few constituencies were seriously contested. These monopolistic conditions implied that nationalist politicians did not have to compete actively for particular blocs of votes unless the local nationalist organisations

fissured under internal strains as was sometimes, though not generally the case. The second and related factor is of course the ideological dominance of nationalist thought. As we have noted briefly in relation to labourers' movements, the overarching structures of Irish nationalism successfully contained the claims of sectional groupings. Public attention was primarily directed towards Home Rule, the sacred cauldron in which all grievances would be mysteriously dissolved.

THE FORCES OF STABILISATION

By concentrating on the varying responses to co-operative developments and identifying their social bases some interesting relationships and interdependencies in the social structure are suggested. These observations are supplemented and clarified by reference to other historical features, in particular national, agrarian, and labour issues. It is evident that the rural social structure was such as to permit the emergence of co-operative creameries on a major scale, there being 350 such creameries in 1914. That co-operative development was constrained in particular directions is also clear. Sometimes this took the form of a filtering action such as we have described in relation to a proposed society in Longford town, but as Anderson points out, the experience is more general.⁶⁸ Where co-operatives uncompromisingly succeeded in extending their posts into hostile territory it follows, ipso facto, that adjustments were made to some existing social and economic patterns. It is significant though that retail societies for farmers and labourers, the most controversial form of co-operation and the type first advocated by Plunkett and Anderson, made very little progress between 1890 and 1914. George Russell estimated there were only about a dozen farmers' retail societies in Ireland in 1910 out of a total of almost a thousand societies.⁶⁹ Fears of the social repercussions of

this kind of co-operation, in the context of the local community, may be illustrated. "Generally co-operative stores clash with other industries, creates (sic) friction, cause bad blood, and too violent an upheaval in the harmonious economic conditions existing."⁷⁰ In similar vein a parish priest, in the course of attacking the idea of co-operative stores and commending the existing retailing system, concluded that "good social relations are worth paying something for".⁷¹

Credit societies were usually acceptable to the main social groups, while agricultural societies (supplying farm inputs such as seeds and fertilisers) failed to assume dangerously competitive dimensions. The comparative weakness of the latter is indicated by its share of total co-operative turnover in 1914 - less than 10% of the total.

In a very real sense then the dominant theme must be one of stability rather than change. Indeed the accommodation of agricultural co-operation and the selective incorporation of aspects of a much broader programme of rural reform serves to underline the basic stability and cohesion of rural society. Even in areas where social conflict was sharp a new equilibrium was established over time. Such conflicts had a strong localised flavour; as perceived by the typical farmer they did not gel together to suggest the necessity of new political alignments. Nor, despite the efforts of the I.A.O.S., did crystallisation of a nationally powerful agricultural interest group occur. In a sense the existence of further stress points in Irish society such as those indicated by the labourers' demands or the call for land redistribution by the western peasantry serve to underline the strength of the integrative forces at work.

In relation to this theme of social stability it is interesting to recall that Marx predicting the downfall of landlordism, first in Ireland and then in England had been "convinced from the first that the social revolution must begin seriously from the bottom, that is from landowner-

ship".⁷² In the event the agrarian revolution solidified private property rights, albeit of a restructured kind, the postulated chain reaction failing to materialise in Ireland not to mention its inability to leap the Irish Sea. Similarly George Russell's claim that "the co-operative movement is an organisation of the rural interests to enable it to meet the organisation of the urban interests" described a potential rather than an actual situation.⁷³ For reasons of a historical and sociological nature, some of which are now drawn together, Irish society is particularly unreceptive to the aggressive forms of agrarianism which have typified areas of rural Europe and still exercise some residual force in parts of the U.S.A.⁷⁴ Also the violent, often brutal confrontations between landholders and landless labourers, particularly associated with the latifundia system of agriculture in Latin America never found a place in the rural Ireland of the peasant proprietor.

The internal stability of rural society is a feature of central significance. What factors underpinned it? Participation in agrarian and political struggles, as we have noted, had helped forge a considerable degree of solidarity between tenant farmers, traders and labourers. Probably a more potent cohesive force binding traders and farmers together was the elaborate kinship network in which farmers and traders were enmeshed. The evidence of a Fr. Clancy, parish priest near Ennis, is worth citing.⁷⁵ His testimony incidentally represents a remarkable anticipation of some of the later findings of the anthropologist C.M. Arensberg on farmer-trader and town and country ties in rural Ireland.

Q. 8460 In your part of the country, is combining farming and shopkeeping legitimate?

Yes. Nearly all the shopkeepers in country districts have land as well.

Q. 8461 And in all country towns the shopkeepers and their sons are married to farmers' daughters, and so have a bit of land?

In some cases the farmer's son who gets his portion from his father, comes into the town and opens a shop.

And he adds later (Q. 8476) the observation that in a town like Ennis "the population is recruited from the country regularly - if not they die out."⁷⁶ The authors of the report on agricultural credit make the general comment that many shopkeepers in Ireland are married to the daughters of farmers or are themselves part-time farmers so that the distinction between the two occupational categories is often weak. Plunkett also noted that the interests of the country traders were "closely interwoven with those of their kinsmen upon the land".⁷⁷ Thus by social origin and by intermarriage, traders were frequently connected in an intimate way to the farming community, and as trade followed kinship lines the harshness of market exchange was mollified through incorporation into a broader pattern of social exchange.⁷⁸

In the course of earlier discussion of social stratification we adduced evidence to suggest that rural traders might be held to constitute part of a class separate from that of farmers. Such a formulation, unless heavily qualified, easily distorts the nature of rural social relations. It is misleading to view traders as petty capitalists who had seeped through the peasant mass and now formed a layer detached from other strata - the cash nexus representing the only or the main connecting tissue. Nor is it sufficient to speak of ties at the class boundaries, a blurring at the edges of adjacent categories. Rather it appears to be the case that farmer ranks were permeated by traders on a broad scale, kinship and other social links tending to knit together these two important social groupings. Renewal of these ties through time limited the possibilities of polarisation between the two; retail markets were not arenas of class warfare.⁷⁹

Such integrative mechanisms hardly operated in the case of labourers. Our knowledge of Irish peasant society, its social structure, its high valuation of property bearing the family name, its finely calculated marriage alliances suggest that intermarriage between labourers and other

social groups was slight. As against this, the personalised economic ties between labourers and farmers, and labourers and local traders, sometimes reinforced by indebtedness, militated against broad based economic conflict. Moreover by the 1900s the numerical weakness of the rural labourers,⁸⁰ the safety valve of emigration, and the problems specific to organisation of a widely dispersed, poorly educated workforce acted against any major class-based threat to communal stability.

The stabilising functions performed by the R.C. clergy should not be overlooked. Reference to various instances of social disturbance within rural society suggests that conflict management and the associated activity of mediation were important clerical functions though mediation is a rather weak expression for interventions which sometimes carried the iron ring of authority.⁸¹ By virtue of his social origins and his national and class sympathies the position of the priest was firmly secured; because of his role and status in the community he was especially well placed to harmonise wayward strands in the social tapestry. But the R.C. clergy not only helped regulate relationships within the local community; they were also instrumental in regulating vertical relationships, those between different levels of the society. These separate roles were not complementary. (It is interesting to contrast the role of the clergyman in some rural societies as a mediator of both horizontal and vertical relationships with that of the Irish R.C. clergyman as a centre of resistance for constitutional agitation.) Because of the fundamental cleavage in Irish society - lines of difference in religion, national outlook, and economic status running close together - the R.C. clergy were not identified with civil institutions and concentrations of wealth and privilege, as in many European countries. This helps explain why the clergy, particularly at parish level, could adopt an aggressive role rather than an apologetic or mediating one when their co-religionists made radical political or economic demands on the

traditional enemy. However, this should not be taken as an indication of social radicalism; the subsequent performance of the Irish clergy on occasions such as the 1913 lock-out in Dublin and their position on social legislation in the Free State reeked of the conservatism of the now dominant social forces in Irish society.

In addition a fundamental set of factors operating in the ideological domain, worked to solidify the social structure. These are the forces of piety and patriotism, the mutually reinforcing bonds of nationalism and Roman Catholicism. Nationalism, as we have seen, spanned divides within the Irish Catholic nation and tended to act as a solvent on social clusterings developing along class or certain interest group lines. An interesting illustration of this may be added: the radical demand for land redistribution among the impoverished western peasantry was superseded in the United Irish League programme (the U.I.L. having emerged from this particular land agitation) by the demand for Home Rule. Similarly the institutions of Roman Catholicism - churches, schools, seminaries - projected a social doctrine and a social practice which inhibited the development of class based frictions within Irish society. One may conclude therefore that these complementary belief systems - fusing historical, political and religious perspectives, and the associated action tendencies - made rural society highly resistant to forces of a socially disruptive kind.

Finally, a methodological and historiographical implication, at least in relation to the study of this period of Irish history may be noted. While class stratification is obviously important it is also clearly the case that a crude class analysis has poor explanatory or predictive power when brought to bear on the intricate patterns of social conflict and social stability that are historically present here. The problems of absorbing the peasantry into a satisfactory theoretical framework have long been recognised, but the complexity of the relationship

between Irish traders and their host agricultural communities is an intriguing and equally awkward issue. Concentration on but one form of stratification, that of class, while illuminating some aspects of rural society would tend to obscure other important social relationships. A more complex theoretical orientation conceiving social stratification as proceeding along a number of other important dimensions - national, religious, kinship (and by extension ethnic) - as well as that of class, is necessary to embrace the rich empirical data.⁸² These various group affiliations are key variables in determining the historical processes we have outlined. A multi-dimensional concept of stratification has further utility in directing attention to the interplay of economic and non-economic forces, neither set being omnipotent in shaping such historical sequences as the land agitations, the labourers' struggles, or the course of agricultural co-operation.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, H. Brody, Inishkillane: Change & Decline in the West of Ireland (Penguin, 1974) and J. Healy, Death of an Irish Town (Cork, 1968).
2. Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland: Final Report (BPP, 1908, XLII), pp. 744-5.
3. The population outside of villages and towns of over 200 inhabitants fell from 5.3 millions in 1841 to 3.8 millions in 1851, and was only marginally above 2 millions in 1911. (These population figures relate to the 26 county area that later constituted the Irish Free State). Source: Agricultural Statistics 1847-1926, compiled by the Department of Industry and Commerce (Dublin, 1928), p. xxix.

On the decline of farm labourers see J. Lee, The Modernisation of Irish Society (Dublin, 1972). p. 2.
4. R. Crotty, Irish Agricultural Production (Cork, 1966), p. 351.
5. In a tour of Ireland in 1856 Frederick Engels - very probably struck by the contrast with the industrial landscape of his more familiar Lancashire - observed: "Gendarmes, priests, lawyers, bureaucrats, country squires in pleasing profusion and a total absence of any industry at all, so that it would be difficult to understand what all these parasitic growths live on if the distress of the peasants did not supply the other half of the picture." These comments - partly perceptive, partly misleading - are contained in a letter to Marx dated 23 May 1856, as reprinted in R. Dixon (ed.), Karl Marx & Frederick Engels on Ireland (London, 1971), p. 83.
6. These changes, and their implications, have been discussed in earlier chapters.
7. E. Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', Amer. Hist. Rev. LXXII (1967), 865.
8. Address by Plunkett to a meeting of northern farmers, as reported in the Northern Whig, 20 Dec. 1895. Indeed, at this meeting Plunkett warned his listeners that if they decided to go ahead and start a co-operative they could expect "a great deal of trade opposition".
9. For a reference to this boycotting see Plunkett Diaries, 25 April 1890. See also L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland (London 1917), pp. 41-2.
10. Cork Examiner, 4 Febr. 1896. See also the report in the Eagle & County Cork Advertiser, 14 March 1896 of a "meeting of the traders and shopkeepers of this town [Kanturk] ... for the purpose of taking practical steps to band themselves together to protect their interests from the great danger with which it is threatened by the farming co-operative system, and of inviting the co-operation and assistance of all the towns and cities of Ireland towards the same object."

11. Rather than including a separate footnote relating to each of the different objections it is more economical to present instances of unfavourable trader reaction in a consolidated form. This is also more realistic in that such reactions normally embodied more than one specific objection. The following is merely a brief selection of newspaper references - news reports, letters, editorials - which illustrate the arguments of the trading community. Eagle and County Cork Advertiser, 31 March 1894 and frequently thereafter; Irish Daily Independent, 7 Oct. '95; Freeman's Journal, many issues during Oct. '95; Enniscorthy Guardian, 21 Dec. '95; Waterford Star, 1 Feb. '96; Cork Examiner, 2 April '96.
12. "A good many of the traders of the town who are shareholders believing that their own interests would suffer if the society extended their operations beyond the butter making, mustered in great force with the intention of opposing such a proceeding, and all the more so in consequence of their being debarred from representation on the committee ...". Roscommon Herald, 30 Nov. '95. Report also in the Westmeath Examiner, 30 Nov. '95.
13. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland (London 1935), p. 15. For other recollections of trader opposition from that source see pp. 21-2, 92, 116-7, 121.
14. L. Smith-Gordon and L. Staples, Rural Reconstruction in Ireland, p. 123. For the course of the struggle see the Irish Homestead during 1895.
15. See report of a public meeting in Nenagh on the subject of agricultural co-operation in the Cork Examiner, 18 March 1896. Note also the claims of the reverend chairman of Kyle Co-operative Credit Society (near Roscrea, Co. Tipperary): each time local farmers visit the neighbouring towns they come back stuffed with anti-co-operative propaganda. Reported in Nenagh News, 25 Sept. 1897.
16. P. Gallagher, Paddy the Cope: My Story (revised edition, Tralee, n.d.).
17. Waterford Star, 1 Feb. 1896.
18. Plunkett Diaries, 20 Nov. 1911. These diaries contain some specific instances of trader opposition to co-operation. See, for instance, entries relating to Cavan (22 Sept.), Drogheda (3 Nov.), and Downpatrick (4 Nov.) during the year 1896.
19. Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, Annual Report 1912, Dublin 1913, p. 4. For a further selection of references from this source to antagonism between traders and co-operative organisers see the annual reports of the following years: 1897 (p. 35), 1900 (p. 8), 1910 (p. 23), 1911 (p. 45), 1914 (p. 73), and 1917 (pp. 36-7). The last is quite interesting in that it refers to attempts to organise opposition on a county wide basis at a relatively late stage of co-operative development: "the traders of all the towns of Cork County are being 'roped' into an organisation and asked 'to pool' some of their profits to be used to prevent any but legitimate traders being supplied by the wholesale houses."

20. The experience of Irish consumer co-operation - mainly urban in character and separate from the ideological and organisational framework of the agricultural co-operative movement - is also in line with this general observation. This strand of Irish history has not attracted detailed attention as yet, but the following contemporary accounts strengthen this view: The Co-operative Union, Annual Congress Report 1892 (Manchester), p. 63, and the annual reports of 1902 (p. 129) and 1912 (pp. 199-200) respectively. Also Labour Co-partnership, Aug. 1898, p. 125.
21. These resolutions of support for the I.A.O.S. are published in an appendix to the I.A.O.S. annual report of 1906. Five years later the I.A.O.S. was again obliged to call on the societies affiliated to it to assert publicly its independence of party politics - I.A.O.S., annual reports for 1911 (p. 50) and 1912 (p. 69) respectively.
22. D.A.T.I., Journal, VIII (1908), 220.
23. Freeman's Journal, 24 Jan. to 1 Feb. 1908; Irish Homestead, 1 Feb. 1908. This acrimonious affair involved several leading public figures, John Redmond M.P. and T.W. Russell on the one hand, and Horace Plunkett, T.W. Rolleston, and George Russell (the last in his capacity as editor of the co-operative paper the Irish Homestead) on the other.
24. Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 20 Feb. 1894.
25. Eagle and County Cork Advertiser, 1 Sept. 1894.
26. Eagle and County Cork Advertiser, 11 May, 1895.
27. Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 6 Feb. 1894.
28. Nenagh News, 21 Aug. 1897.
29. Important vignettes of rural priest and people are contained in two largely autobiographical accounts: Rev. J. Guinan, The Soggarth Aroon (6th ed. Dublin, 1941) and Rev. P. Hickey, Inisfail or Distant Days in Tipperary (Dublin 1906). Less sentimental are the reminiscences of another rural priest - P.Ó Laoghaire, Mo Sgéal Féin (Dublin, 1915). Note also Rev. W. McDonald, Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor (Cork, 1967) and J. Ross, 'Some Memories of a Kindly Old Parish Priest' Teathbha (Journal of the Longford Historical Society), Vol. 1, No. 3, 1973. Various popular images of the priesthood are reflected in oral testimony collected by the Irish Folklore Commission; see for example Ms 437, pp. 368-9, Ms 815, pp. 18-20, Ms 107, p. 316.
30. Most helpful on the social origins of the Irish priesthood is K.H. Connell, Irish Peasant Society (Oxford, 1968), pp. 123-6.

It may be worth noting that Kenny, a hostile critic of the clergy, claimed the latter showed a preference for the wealthier over the poorer members of their congregations. P. Kenny, Economics for Irishmen (4th ed., Dublin, 1907), p. 148.

31. McDonald, op.cit. p. 213. Note also George Russell's acerbic comment that in the field of labour relations the Church had been "advocating a servile peace". Russell, The National Being (Dublin, 1916), pp. 76-77.
32. It cannot have helped in reassuring local clergymen that Michael Davitt, one of the few major political figures of this period to champion the cause of the Irish labourer, was frequently the object of episcopal denunciations. F. Sheehy-Skeffington, Michael Davitt (London, 1967), pp. 202-4.
33. See reports of labourers' meetings previously cited. A recent work (A. Mitchell, Labour in Irish Politics 1890-1930 (Irish University Press, 1974) has an interesting but rather brief account of rural labour organisation at the end of the nineteenth century. Also useful are the recollections of D.D. Sheehan, Ireland Since Parnell (London, 1921). Sheehan was elected as M.P. for mid-Cork in 1901 on a Land and Labour platform, beating in the process the official United Irish League candidate.
34. R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, p. 101; Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (BPP, 1914, XIII), 217.
35. Royal Commission on Labour: The Agricultural Labourer (BPP, 1893-4, XXXVII). Note also Anon. ('A Guardian of the Poor'), The Irish Peasant: A Sociological Study (London, 1892), ch. 7. One dimension of rural social relations is neatly encapsulated in the following comment (p. 133): "... nor must a man of the working class or a farm servant dare to cast his eyes on a farmer's daughter."

Leading co-operators, who appear to have been genuinely concerned with strengthening ties between farmers and labourers, more than occasionally referred to the social division separating the two. Speaking of the need to develop forms of co-operation that embraced the labourer also, Lord Monteagle noted "a much more sharply defined cleavage between the two classes of Farmer and Labourer" in the relatively prosperous farming regions of Munster and Leinster - I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1900, pp. 120-1. For other co-operators' comments on the issue see Annual Report 1902, p. 9, Annual Report 1914, p. 60, and H. Plunkett, Noblesse Oblige, Dublin 1908, p. 30.

36. T.W. Moody, 'The New Departure in Irish Politics 1878-9', in Cronne, Moody and Quinn (eds.) Essays in British and Irish History in honour of J.E. Todd (London, 1949).
37. Nenagh News, 22 Dec. 1894.
38. This point was made very forcefully by the Irish socialist leader James Connolly, writing in L'Irlande Libre, Paris 1897 - reprinted in Desmond Ryan (ed.), Socialism and Nationalism : a selection from the writings of James Connolly (Dublin 1948).
39. 'A Guardian of the Poor' in The Irish Peasant (p. 144), numbers publicans, provision merchants and shopkeepers among the wealthier groups in the nation. Of the co-operative pioneers, George Russell expressed this opinion in the most trenchant terms. See George

Russell, Co-operation and Nationality (Dublin, 1912).

One might also speculate in relation to rural Ireland at the end of the 19th century: given the relative stability of farm sizes and a fairly inactive land market the possibilities of upward social mobility were probably greater in trading than in agriculture.

40. W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board, (Dublin, 1925), p. 8; Congested Districts Board, Inspectors' Local Reports 1892-8 (Dublin, 1898); Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland, minutes of evidence, appendices and index (BPP, 1914, XIII), Q. 4501.
41. C.M. Arensberg, The Irish Countryman (Mass., 1959), p. 163.
42. I would argue that, while there are no convincing grounds for according traders a disproportionate number of places in the demonological sphere, they were overrepresented in the sphere of politics. This asymmetry does not seem to be subversive of arguments unfolded in earlier chapters.
43. S. Clark, 'The Social Composition of the Land League', Irish Historical Studies, XVII (1971), 447-469; Clark, 'The Political Mobilisation of Irish Farmers', Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, XII, (1975) 483-499. The popular upsurge that undermined the landed ascendancy and eventually inaugurated peasant proprietorship is vividly recollected by one of the chief participants, Michael Davitt, in The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland (London, 1904).
44. Although the more general point is not made, it appears in many rural societies that the impact of non-farming groups (scattered through the farming areas) is out of proportion to their actual numbers. Note, for instance: S.H. Franklin, Rural Societies (London, 1971), pp. 8-9.
45. For an interesting (if not wholly persuasive) interpretation of this phase of constructive unionist activity see F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the Famine (revised edn., Fontana, 1973), pp. 202-23. Note also J.C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923 (reprint, London, 1973), pp. 405-10.
46. Disraeli's striking image of the "two nations" within society has strong literal as well as metaphorical content when applied to late 19th century Ireland. This dual aspect highlights disjunctions in the body politic - the sharp antithetical relationship between Big House and peasant homestead, between imperial perspective and a developing Gaelic ethnocentrism.
47. See for example the vitriolic comments of two Sligo county councillors on co-operative enterprise, as seen from the trader's viewpoint - Irish Times, 1 March 1976 (original report in the Sligo Champion). Note also J. Johnston, Irish Agriculture in Transition (Oxford, 1951), p. 147.
48. Irish Homestead, 15 Febr. 1908. Similar type claims were sometimes voiced by labourers' spokesmen. See, for instance, labourers' meeting reported in the Nenagh News, 21 Aug. 1897. Note also I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1914, pp. 58-9 and H. Plunkett, Noblesse Oblige, p.30.

49. Marx formulated the problem as follows: "In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them they do not form a class." Marx and Engels; Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, edited by L.S. Feuer (New York, 1959), pp. 338-9.
50. T. Shanin, 'Peasantry as a Political Factor', in T. Shanin (ed.), Peasants and Peasant Society (Penguin 1971).
51. One should probably also place some emphasis on the role of large farmers - those with holdings of 100 acres upwards - who cannot be meaningfully regarded as part of the peasant category. In our present state of knowledge to attempt to indicate anything more than a very crude dividing line between the two categories seems to be futile. A basic recognition of this break in the social composition of the tenantry - even if the empirical data on farm structure do not admit of ready stuffing into theoretical boxes - is, however, important. A finer internal classification of the peasant category might also be attempted; the present concern, though, is with developing broad themes that are not qualified out of existence by scrupulous but uncritical attention to subsidiary themes.

It may be worth adding that there appears to be disquiet on the part of some Irish writers about the use of the term peasantry. At a half-humorous level this has occasionally been regarded as an impish, if rather dubious importation on the part of the late Professor K.H. Connell. More seriously, Professor Lee in a rather ambiguous passage, seems to suggest that as a conceptual term the peasant category is useless. J. Lee, 'The Dual Economy in Ireland' in T.D. Williams (ed.), Historical Studies (Dublin, 1969), p. 193. If I have interpreted him correctly then I would wish to dissent from such a position (however it may be that Professor Lee is restricting his criticism to a particular loose usage of the term peasantry). Adequate discussion of the value and limitations of this theoretical construct would require a chapter rather than a footnote so the issue is not pursued here.

52. J. Lee, The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918 Dublin 1973, pp. 67-9, 72; S. Clark, 'The Social Composition of the Land League' loc. cit.

It should also be recalled that the early propagation of the co-operative movement was due solely to the endeavours of a non-farming elite. Thus in two important social movements affecting rural Ireland in the last two decades of the nineteenth century the initiating energy and specification of objectives sprang from outside the tenant and labouring classes. Such responses point to the greater socio-political development of other groups.

53. E.R. Wolf, 'On Peasant Rebellions', International Social Science Journal, XXI (1969), 286-293. See also T. Shanin, 'The Peasantry as a Political Factor', Sociological Review, XIV (1966), 5-27.
54. Further lines of weakness stem from divergences of interest within the farming population. Access to land was a particularly contentious issue, as the C.D.B. discovered when it set about breaking up large estates and distributing the land among competing applicants. Note Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland (BPP, 1908, XLII), pp. 13, 16-17, 46-8. Also in the key livestock industry, the different stages of cattle production linking calf-breeding, store, and cattle fattening regions were potential points of strain - as more generally was the variation in farm commodities produced. The general point on commodity variation is reflected by the existence of large numbers of rural interest groups in the Irish Republic. The alternative pattern of one or a few powerful representative bodies (as in England for example) is beginning to take shape only in very recent times.
55. These criticisms ranged from charges of exploitative behaviour (e.g. Anderson, op.cit. p. 15) to dismissive comments of incompetence and inefficiency (e.g. H. Plunkett, 'Co-operative Stores for Ireland', The Nineteenth Century, Sept. 1888, 411. For a further sampling of co-operators' views on the nature of trading links in rural Ireland see I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1895 (pp. 17-21), Annual Report 1898 (p.47), Annual Report 1913 (p. 51), and the Irish Homestead, 8 Jan. 1910.
56. Anderson, op.cit. pp. 87-8. Note also Russell, Co-operation and Nationality, p. 42.
57. See, for example, the Irish co-operators' report to the (British) Co-operative Union in 1892. Co-operative Union, Annual Congress Report 1892 (Manchester), p. 63.
58. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1913, p. 55.
59. Address by Fr. Finlay published in I.A.O.S. Annual Report 1915, p. 45; George Russell, The Building up of a Rural Civilization (Dublin, 1909); R.A. Anderson, With Horace Plunkett in Ireland, p. 75; H. Plunkett in Report of the First International Co-operative Congress (London, 1895), p. 218. Note also Plunkett's address to the Council of Agriculture in 1906 - D.A.T.I., Journal, VII (1907), pp. 224-8.
60. Ernest Barker, Ireland in the Last Fifty Years (1866-1918), (second and enlarged edition Oxford, 1919), pp. 77-8.
61. A small and conservative Farmers' Party did in fact emerge to represent the more prosperous sections of farmers over the decade 1922-1932. Its impact was slight. More significant though is the non-emergence of a strong farmer party in this overwhelmingly rural society. In the post-independence period Irish politics have been dominated by two political parties whose membership cuts vertically through the social hierarchy, both parties also having very substantial rural bases.
62. See debate on the issue at the annual general meeting of the I.A.O.S., as reported in Annual Report 1911, appendix B.

63. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1910, appendix E. In a similar vein the Irish Homestead, 18 June 1910, exhorted its readers: "They [farmers] must support their central organisation and use it as the medium for expression of their opinions. They must insist on respect being paid to this body which is supported by them and which represents their societies. The I.A.O.S. is the nearest thing to a farmers' trades union there is in these islands".
64. H. Plunkett, Plain Talks to Irish Farmers (Dublin, 1910), pp. 14-15.
65. The outstanding example of this is the activity of a diverse group of Irish M.P.'s - the short-lived but successful Recess Committee - who analysed and offered prescriptions for the ills of Irish agriculture in 1896. Recess Committee, Report on the Establishment of a Department of Agriculture and Industries for Ireland (Dublin, 1896). Instances of pressure group activity by the I.A.O.S. include securing changes in legislation governing co-operative societies and leading opposition to measures such as the Irish Creameries and Dairy Produce Bill and the Dairies, Cowsheds and Milk Shops Order.
66. Anderson, who had something of a siege mentality in relation to the place of the farming community in Irish society, could claim as late as 1935 that "the farmers and their industry are without any semblance of a close-knit and powerful organisation which could provide adequate protection against the many perils, political and other, which constantly beset them." Anderson, op.cit. p. 75.
67. Irish Homestead, 19 March 1910.
68. Anderson, op.cit. p.15.
69. Irish Homestead, 16 April 1910.
70. Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland (1914), Q. 10560.
71. Ibid. Q. 8896.
72. Marx to Ludwig Krugelmann, 6 April 1868, reprinted in K. Marx and F. Engels on Ireland, p. 150.
73. George Russell, Co-operation and Nationality, p. 45; also Irish Homestead, 24 Nov. 1906.
74. W.L. Flinn and D.E. Johnson, 'Agrarianism among Wisconsin Farmers', Rural Sociology, XXXIX (1974).

Stinchcombe, drawing on data from a wide range of countries in Europe, America and elsewhere finds for rural economies characterised by family smallholdings that the associated farming communities are highly unified and generally organised in opposition to urban interests (especially middlemen and finance capitalists). While the Irish case can be contained within the ambit of the first generalisation, it is definitely at variance with the second. See A.L. Stinchcombe, 'Agricultural Enterprise and Rural Class Relations', American Journal of Sociology, LXVII (1961-2), 165-176.

75. Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit (1914), QQ. 8460-8476.
76. Ibid.
77. I.A.O.S., Annual Report 1912, p. 50.
78. "... the country customer who brings his trade into the shop does so in response to the ties of kinship and friendliness... Many indeed are the shops which rely almost entirely upon this 'family trade'. Others know it to be the base upon which they must build." Arensberg, op.cit. p. 154.
79. This conclusion may be contrasted with a very stimulating interpretation of food markets and group conflict in a different historical context; E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, no. 50 (Febr. 1971), 76-136.
80. Only one in every four persons engaged in agriculture in Ireland (26 counties) in 1912 was a wage-earner - Agricultural Statistics 1847-1926, ch. 5.
81. Report of the Evicted Tenants Commission (BPP, 1893-4, XXXI), p. 27; Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 7 Febr. 1890; J. Guinan, The Soggarth Aroon, op.cit. pp. 117-8; J. Ross, 'Some Memories of a Kindly Old Parish Priest', op.cit. p. 223. These sources illustrate four different types of clerical mediation, relating to land disputes, employer-labour relations, legal, and domestic problems respectively. However it should also be borne in mind that from the late 19th century onwards the diffuse role of the priest was increasingly circumscribed as specialisation became more marked in the economic, political and administrative spheres.
82. This seems to be especially pertinent in relation to more traditional societies. See International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XV (1968), p. 289.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL

Archives of the Irish Folklore Commission (University College, Dublin).

Plunkett Diaries: the private diaries of Horace (later Sir Horace) Plunkett are at the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, St. Giles, Oxford.

Plunkett Papers: these are also available at the Plunkett Foundation.

*Records of the Borrisoleigh Co-op. Society Ltd.

*Records of the Clodagh Co-op. Society Ltd.

*Records of the Templederry Co-op. Society Ltd.

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